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Experiences from Frontline Forest Communities

**Covid-19 impacts on Indigenous Peoples and
Local Communities, women and forest and
wildlife illegality in the Congo Basin**



F A O - E U F L E G T P R O G R A M M E



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Disclaimer

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BVRIO-ATIBT	BV Rio organisation- International Tropical Timber Technical Association
CAM	Cameroon
CED	Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement
CIDT	Centre for International Development and Training, University of Wolverhampton (UK)
CJJ	Comptoir Juridique Junior
CV4C	Citizens Voices for Change
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FLAG	Field Legality Advisory Group
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IP	Indigenous Peoples
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
IWT	Illegal Wildlife Trade
MINFOF	Ministère des Forêts et de La Faune, Cameroon
MSMEs	Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
OGF	Observatoire de la Gouvernance Forestière
PMUAIC-19	Programme Multisectoriel d'Urgence d'Atténuation des Impacts de la COVID-19 EN République Démocratique du Congo
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
ROC	Republic of Congo
UFA	Unité Forestière d'Aménagement
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Organisation for Women
UNFPA	United Nations Populations' Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organisation

Contents

Executive Summary	7
Introduction.....	11
Methodology of the study	15
Findings	17
Impact of the pandemic on respondents.....	20
Proposed actions to address the impacts of Covid-19	33
Perception of forest illegality in the Congo Basin	37
Proposed actions to address Covid impacts on forest and wildlife illegality	45
Conclusion and recommendations.....	49
References	52
Annex 1: Survey Questionnaire (in French):.....	54

List of Figures and Tables

Table 1: Study areas.....	15
Table 2: Questionnaires administered.....	16
Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by gender in CAM.....	17
Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by gender in DRC.....	17
Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by gender in Congo.....	17
Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by gender and main source of income in DRC	18
Figure 5: Distribution of respondents by gender and main source of income in Cameroon	18
Figure 6: Distribution of respondents by gender and main source of income in Congo	19
Figure 7: Perceived impacts of COVID in DRC	20
Figure 8: Perceived impacts of COVID in Cameroon.....	20
Figure 9: Impact of COVID-19 on respondents by main source of income in Cameroon	21
Figure 10: Impact of Covid-19 on respondents by main source of income in DRC	21
Figure 11: Impact of Covid-19 on respondents by main source of income in Congo	22
Figure 12: Impact of Covid-19 on respondents in Congo.....	22
Figure 13: Impact of Covid- 19 on respondents in Congo by professional activity	23
Figure 14: Income loss distribution between men and women in Congo.....	23
Figure 15: Perceived impacts of COVID on incomes in DRC	24
Figure 16: Comparison of perceived income losses by gender in DRC.....	24
Figure 17: Effect of pandemic on indigenous peoples in Cameroon.....	25
Figure 18: Impacts of pandemic on indigenous peoples and forest dependent communities in DRC.....	26
Figure 19: Impacts on indigenous peoples in Congo	27
Figure 20: Impacts on forest dependent women in DRC	28
Figure 21: Impact of the pandemic on forest dependent women in Congo.....	29
Figure 22: Impact on forest dependent women in Cameroon	30
Figure 23: Distribution of respondents based on adaptive measures taken in DRC	31
Figure 24: Existence of adaptation measures for Covid-19 by the respondents in Cameroon.....	32
Figure 25: Existence of adaptation measures for Covid-19 by the respondents in ROC.....	32
Table 3: How to address Covid-19 impacts on IPLCs and women	33
Figure 26: Perception of respondents regarding forest control presence on the ground in Cameroon	37
Figure 27: Perception of respondents regarding forest control presence on the ground in DRC	38
Figure 28: Perception of respondents regarding forest control presence on the ground in Congo	39
Figure 29: Perception of illegal logging in Cameroon.....	40
Figure 30: Perception of illegal logging in DRC.....	41
Figure 31: Perception of illegal logging in Cameroon.....	42
Figure 32: Perception of Wildlife trafficking in Cameroon	43
Figure 32: Perception of Wildlife trafficking in DRC	44
Figure 33: Perception of Wildlife trafficking in Congo.....	44

Executive Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a significant and unprecedented global crisis, with the harshest impacts being felt by the poor and working classes across the world. On the African continent, the pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of indigenous and tribal peoples and other forest-dependent communities, who were already facing the consequences of climate change, deforestation, forest fires and illegal logging. As part of its response to the pandemic, the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT), carried out a survey of frontline communities impacted by the pandemic in the Congo Basin. This was done as part of its Citizen Voice for Change project (CV4C) which seeks to strengthen civil society independent forest monitoring and law enforcement in the region. The overarching aim of this study was to address the knowledge gap regarding the impacts of Covid-19 on frontline forest dependent communities in the Congo Basin. With additional financial support of the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme and in line with the objectives of the CV4C project, we were particularly interested in understanding the impacts on forest illegality during the pandemic. Finally, it sought to identify the measures and tools that are necessary to enable communities and stakeholders to build back better and strengthen resilience.

We surveyed 7000 forest dependent community members in three CV4C project intervention countries (Cameroon, Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo). Based on the survey results, it is clear that forest dependent communities in the three targeted countries of the Congo Basin are facing significant hardships, with the majority reporting a reduction or a total loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The confinement and lockdown measures imposed by the governments of the three countries have made it more difficult for these communities to maintain their access to the forests, and forest resources (including their fields and crops). In addition, most of these communities lack awareness and/or access to basic protective equipment. Findings show that the pandemic has hit women in the forest dependent communities the hardest, whether economically, socially or psychologically. Economically, most women reported the most significant losses in incomes, and subsequently their ability to manage household expenses, especially with their roles as caregivers.

Evidence suggests that for some women, the pandemic has increased the burden of

responsibilities on women (both household and productive) whilst at the same time limiting opportunities for them to address the shortfall in household incomes. Many of them reported fear and anxiety due to the pandemic, as their social support groups (mostly other women from their village gathering and working together) have been banned because of social distancing. Some of them also reported being victims of domestic violence and/ or other forms of gender-based violence.

Most of the respondents in all countries reported a perceived decline in the presence of forest control officials on the ground. Consequently, the majority of respondents in the three targeted countries had the impression that illegal logging was increasing due to the lack of effective forest control. Respondents further attributed the perceived rise in illegal logging to the parallel rise in artisanal logging, citing evidence of increased activity by chainsaw loggers and exploitation beyond permit boundaries in some cases. Similarly, the views of respondents on wildlife trafficking ran counter to the initial assumptions of the study. Overall, respondents in fact perceived that there had been a decline in illegal wildlife trafficking in their communities. This was somewhat surprising since our initial hypothesis was that illegal logging was likely to go hand in hand with illegal wildlife trafficking. Most respondents believe that the decrease was due to poachers and local hunters being afraid of COVID-19 as a zoonotic disease. Some respondents felt that poaching and wildlife trafficking was decreasing because of a drop in demand from cities due to lockdown measures and limited transportation facilities to transport game to cities. With declining forest controls and perceived rising forest illegality, actions need to be taken to strengthen forest and wildlife law enforcement by stakeholders. This includes a stronger role for civil society independent forest monitoring actions.

A set of recommendations for different relevant stakeholders (national governments of the targeted countries, civil society organisations, international donors and local communities) were provided based on the findings of the study.



For governments in the targeted countries

- There is a strong need to provide support for forest dependent communities and indigenous people: many of them suffered from the poorly implemented lockdown policies, and they have not been reached by any forms of social protection or social assistance to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Having said that, it is important for the government to provide support to build back better livelihoods for these vulnerable categories of the population, with a special focus on youth and women. These better livelihood programmes can be built in an innovative way, through nature-based solutions such as micro-loans to farmers to re-build their fields or to add other sources of food/income through agriculture, tree planting and livestock production including species domestication, which respect both people's culture, climate and biodiversity.
- Ensuring legality/sustainability and inclusive development is at the forefront of a green economic recovery agenda: there is a strong need to ensure effective and efficient forest control missions by the competent authorities. Solutions should also be found for recurrent systemic problems such as corruption. Similarly, it is necessary for the government to increase staff incentives to deter them from corrupt practices. Increased sanctions and engagement with anticorruption agencies and traditional law enforcement could improve forest law enforcement outcomes.
- With a perceived rise in illegal logging from companies and chainsaw operators, continuous support is necessary to organise the domestic market. An example is through facilitating access of domestic operators to public procurement contracts as an incentive to drive down demand for illegal timber. Citizen sensitisation on access to legal timber could also reduce demand for these products.
- It is important to work in partnership with civil society organisations in order to respond more effectively to the needs of women in forest dependent communities. Priorities include providing accessible health care facilities for them, rethinking the legal and law enforcement framework in order to protect them against gender based and domestic violence, or providing financial and material support to help them rebuild their lost livelihoods. Communities would also benefit from mental health support to help them cope with the negative impacts of violence and confinement.
- The history of zoonotic diseases in the Congo Basin suggests that there is a need for governments to engage communities in building resilience and response plans. Participatory plans including working with local community organisations, women's associations, community forestry groups, microfinance institutions could strengthen future response to pandemics and reduce negative impacts on communities. The establishment of social safety nets is particularly important where community livelihoods are impacted.

For national and international NGOs

- Civil society needs to provide more support to forest dependent communities and indigenous people, not only by providing immediate humanitarian support, micro projects or other forms of technical and financial support, but also by enabling these communities to defend their rights and denounce forest illegality. Civil society organisations can also support community monitoring of forests through the use of technology where these technologies are available.
- Civil society organisations need to work together with forest dependent communities and indigenous people to ensure that women and youth are participating effectively in recovery investment planning, and to ensure that their needs are taken into consideration.
- A special focus should be placed on women in forest dependent communities, to respond not only to their immediate economic problems but also to respond more effectively to their other social and healthcare needs. This should prioritise providing more accessible and reliable healthcare facilities for women in these communities and deliver targeted actions to protect them against gender-based violence.
- The need for strong civil society involvement in independent forest monitoring, and active intervention in the field of conservation and combatting the illegal wildlife trade, is more crucial than ever in the post- Covid-19 era. With a decline in government presence on the ground and rising forest illegality, stronger civil society monitoring capability is needed to support/ complement government efforts.
- In addition to monitoring at forest level, civil society needs to monitor government commitments to fight forest illegality, biodiversity conservation and climate change. There is a risk that governments might prioritise investments in destructive extractive industries in order to rebuild economies. Strong advocacy and monitoring could help maintain momentum on commitments made.
- Civil society organisations and monitoring organisations must also build their own capabilities to operate in periods of pandemic. This includes increasing technological capabilities as well as building stronger community monitoring networks with community leaders and citizens.

For donors

- Provide targeted support to forest dependent communities, IPLCs and women through green recovery projects. This could include building resilience through community forestry, women's associations, microfinance support to women and IPLCs, provide shock- responsive social protection for vulnerable communities, ideally in cooperation with national governments and local civil society. Entrepreneurship and business incubator support schemes could further support local government actions.
- Prioritise support to governments to strengthen forest and wildlife law enforcement and monitoring and maintain pressure not to relax commitments made to fight forest and environmental crime and climate change
- Provide support for local civil society in projects related to social protection, fighting Gender Based Violence and support to both physical and mental health services for forest dependent communities.



For communities

- Continue to respect national guidelines regarding social distancing and other control measures.
- Continue to mobilise in village groups and other associations to maintain social support networks and to explore community responses to Covid-19 impacts.
- Explore all avenues to participate and engage in post Covid recovery planning, to ensure that community needs are effectively taken into consideration by decision makers.
- Engage with the government, civil society and donor efforts to support local livelihoods through climate smart nature- based solutions or green enterprises, that provide employment, protect the environment and build resilience.
- Enhance sensitisation and awareness in communities to denounce illegal loggers and poachers and promote alternative opportunities for hunters and poachers.
- Explore linkages with independent forest and wildlife monitoring and law enforcement agencies in order to build community systems for monitoring and law enforcement in communities in the face of rising forest and other environmental crimes. The use of smart and mobile phone technologies could increase reporting of illegality and serve as a disincentive for illegal actors operating in communities.

Foreign governments

- As vaccines are developed and approved, vaccine nationalism is likely to emerge. Promote support to Congo Basin governments to access and distribute vaccines to their communities, including specific emphasis on vulnerable forest dependent communities.
- In the face of global GDP declines, maintain or increase international development aid commitments to ensure that health, environmental and other global climate objectives are kept on track.

Introduction

Forests provide a wide range of tangible and non-tangible goods and services, from the local level to the global level (Wunder et al., 2014; Garcia-Nieto et al., 2013). Estimates of the number of people who derive direct or indirect benefits from the world's forests in terms of employment, forest products, livelihoods and incomes stand at between 1 to 1.5 billion (Agrawal et al., 2013). Congo Basin forests form the second largest block of rainforest in the world after the Amazon and provide direct subsistence services to over 60 million people, in addition to other social and cultural services particularly to indigenous forest peoples (FAO, 2014). It is widely recognised that rising environmental crime not only poses a significant threat to the livelihoods of forest dependent peoples but also the rule of law, national security and global health. Environmental crime traps states in a vicious circle where, as they lose income due to illegality, they become even less capable of properly governing their natural resources (Nelleman et al., 2018). This category of crime, which includes logging, poaching and trafficking of a wide range of animals, illegal fisheries, illegal mining and dumping of toxic waste, is now worth \$110-281 billion annually (Maher and Sollund, 2016). Illegal wildlife trade (IWT) involves the illegal capture, collection, hunting, poaching, trade and smuggling of endangered, protected wildlife, derivatives and or its products. It is estimated that about 75% of newly emerging infectious diseases are zoonoses derived partly from deforestation, illegally harvested and traded species (Wang et al., 2020). The Ebola epidemic in West Africa (Gebreyes et al., 2014) and the global COVID 19 pandemic are stark reminders of the catastrophic global impacts of illegal trade in wildlife species (Anderson et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a significant and unprecedented global crisis, with the harshest impacts being felt by the poor and working classes across the world (FAO, 2020a). On the African continent, this 'new' pandemic has exacerbated other ongoing crises including civil conflicts, climate change, environmental degradation, unemployment and rising poverty, hunger, increased violence, specifically violence against women. It is expected that the COVID-19 pandemic will negatively impact 370 million indigenous peoples around the world (Power et al., 2020, p. 2737).

According to the ILO, "the pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of indigenous and tribal peoples and other forest-dependent communities, who were already facing the consequences of climate change, deforestation, forest fires and illegal logging" (ILO, 2020, p. 3). Observers have also raised concerns that the Covid-19 pandemic could lead to a rise in forest and other environmental crimes (FAO, 2020b), but most of this research has been based on anecdotal evidence (Greenpeace, 2020). Recent research has begun to document the impacts on food security (Rahman et al., 2020; Workie et al., 2020); community rights (United Nations Human Rights, 2020), wildlife policy (Roe et al., 2020) and consequences for wildlife and biodiversity (Rondeau et al., 2020). There is paucity of evidence on the impacts of Covid from the lived experiences of IPLCs and women or of what actions need to be undertaken to address or mitigate the challenges facing these communities. Without such evidence, ongoing measures and future interventions are less likely to be effective without understanding of frontline concerns. This research sought to address these knowledge gaps by generating evidence from frontline communities in the Congo Basin. The objective is to assist evidence based decision making amongst stakeholder groups involved in the development and implementation of Covid response programmes and policies.

The research is based on a survey of 7000 forest dependent communities in Cameroon, Republic of Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo. These countries represent the most important timber producing countries in Central Africa as well as being part of the EU/FCDO funded Citizen Voices for Change Project led by the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) which seeks to strengthen civil society independent forest monitoring and law enforcement in the region. As part of this project, we were particularly interested in the likely implications for independent forest monitoring and how best to support post-COVID-19 recovery and resilience building.

The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the gender disaggregated impacts of COVID-19 on forest dependent communities and women in particular?
2. How are communities dealing with the pandemic?
3. What are the perceived impacts of COVID-19 on forest control, forest illegality and wildlife trafficking?
4. What measures and tools are necessary to enable communities and stakeholders to build back better and strengthen resilience?

The remaining part of the report is structured as follows. We begin with a brief review of government actions taken in the three target countries to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Next, we review available literature on reported impacts of Covid-19 on forest dependent communities, forest sector and forest and wildlife illegality. We then present the research methodology followed by the survey results. The findings are presented in two sections: Section one focuses on impacts on communities and proposed measures while section two addresses the impacts on forest and wildlife governance issues. We end the report with a conclusion and recommendations for stakeholders.

Government responses to Covid-19

In our countries of interest, as in many other countries across the world, the governments have imposed restrictive measures in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus. In **Cameroon** for example, the government announced a package of 13 containment measures on March 17, 2020 including closure of land, air and sea borders, quarantine for travellers returning from a country with a high level of infection, closure of schools and universities, prohibition of gatherings of more than 50 persons, closure of bars, restaurants and entertainment spots after 6 pm, suspension of missions of civil servants and parastatals abroad, cancellation of school and university games, and a ban on overloading taxis and public transportation. On April 10, 2020, the government took seven additional measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. These measures took effect from April 13, 2020 and included wearing a mask in all areas open to the public, local production of drugs and screening tests, establishment of specialized COVID-19 treatment centres in all regional capitals, intensification of screening and awareness-raising campaigns, among others. However, these measures were soon relaxed: on April 30, 2020 the government announced a set of reopening measures. The restriction prohibiting bars, restaurants and leisure facilities from operating after 6 p.m. was lifted, provided customers and users respect social distancing and wear protective masks. The limit on the number of passengers in public transportation vehicles (buses and taxis) was also relaxed but masks remained compulsory and overloading was prohibited. Primary and secondary school students returned to school on June 1, 2020. Similarly, the government announced a response plan to the pandemic, which included a fund of \$646 million to mitigate the economic and financial repercussions of the pandemic, as well as \$9.5 million for the supply

of essential products. An additional \$52 million was allocated to a social resilience fund, to alleviate the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable people and households (IMF, 2020)¹.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the government declared a state of emergency on the 24th of March 2020. Restrictions were imposed which included bans on travel between Kinshasa and the rest of the country and the prohibition of all gatherings of people in public spaces. Flights from abroad were not allowed, and border posts were closed to non-cargo shipments. These measures added to other restrictions such as closure of all education centres, suspension of all religious and sporting events, and closure of bars and restaurants. According to the IMF (2020), the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are projected to reduce real GDP growth (including through lower mining activity), increase consumer prices (particularly of imported products), reduce fiscal revenue (both mining and non-mining), and increase fiscal spending through the implementation of a COVID-19 response plan. In late June 2020, the government announced the relaxation of lockdown measures in the Gombe business district in Kinshasa and major mining sites. Also, a new 9-month multi sectoral response plan against the pandemics (PMUAIC-19) was officially launched in June 2020. The plan included actions to strengthen the health system, stabilize the economy, and reinforce security and social protection (IMF, 2020).

In the **Republic of Congo**, a lockdown was imposed in the country from the 1st of April to the end of May 2020. On May 18th, 2020, the lockdown was eased with opening up of public transportation, primary schools final year class and graduation class. As of late June 2020, restaurants, hotels, and most private

¹ <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>

services were opened in the two main cities: Brazzaville and Pointe Noir. The government prepared a national contingency plan in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other international partners to deal with the pandemic. Part of this contingency plan included the adoption of containment measures, such as social distancing, travel bans on visitors from high risk countries, quarantine for nationals and expatriates returning from these countries, and the closure of schools. The overall cost of the response plan to the COVID 19 epidemic has been estimated at US\$170 million. To date the government has made

available to the Ministry of Health the amount of US\$1.4 million. The European Union (EU), World Food Programme (WFP) and the French government are collaborating to provide support for the poorest segments of the population. Other United Nations agencies have provided about \$8 million to support Covid-19 efforts (IMF, 2020).

Particularly striking in the government response in these countries was the prioritisation of actions in urban areas as opposed to at community level. There is no evidence of any specific actions targeting IPLCs and other forest dependent communities.

Covid-19 impacts on forest dependent communities, forest sector and illegality

In the health sector, little has been done to provide IPs with appropriate care and information services that respects their cultural and traditional beliefs. Indigenous peoples worldwide are more likely to be disadvantaged and tend to be the last population group to receive adequate and culturally adjusted health care (ILO, 2020, p. 3). Policies to tackle the pandemic effects pay little attention to the needs of indigenous peoples (Power et al, 2020. p. 2737). Discrimination and racism against indigenous peoples increase the gap in access to appropriate health care and hence perpetuates inequalities within this sector (McLeod, et al., 2020). Poverty further reduces their capacity to respond to COVID-19 during this crisis since “health outcomes are determined by levels of secure housing, employment, comorbidities, functional literacy, health insurance, food security, access to clean water, access to health care and technology” (Power, et al., 2020). Living in communities that lack running water and easy access to main urban settlements, or where people share communal wells, makes it difficult for communities to follow the general advice on preventing contamination.

In many parts of Africa, bushmeat contributes substantially to the animal protein supply and often fetches a higher price in markets than livestock meat, particularly in tropical and subtropical areas characterized by poverty and food insecurity. Hunters enter deep into forested areas following logging and mining roads to source wild animals in response to a growing urban demand, with customers often regarding bushmeat as a delicacy and a prestige food. High demand for wild animals for consumption and trade and consequent increased contacts between wildlife and humans have been blamed for the emergence of zoonotic diseases such as Ebola and Covid (Volpato et al., 2020). The pandemic exacerbated this situation through more difficult access to markets, mobility

restrictions to access food, increased food prices and decreased incomes (Power, et al., 2020, p. 2738). Additionally, lockdown measures, restrictions on movement and the ban on hunting or consuming wild meat have disproportionately impacted on indigenous peoples as they are limited in obtaining food (ILO, 2020, p. 4). In Cameroon, DRC and Congo, anecdotal evidence from Green-Peace Africa (2020) and Fern (2020) suggests that restrictions relating to COVID-19, have reduced activities in communities, including those linked to community forest projects. Furthermore, tourism incomes were reduced as visitors were not allowed to travel. According to Fern, government-proposed measures did not effectively reach village communities in the Republic of Congo.

Emerging evidence on the impacts of Covid-19 in the Congo Basin paints a very difficult picture. Looking at the forest sector in the Republic of Congo, the impact of Covid-19 pandemic was felt throughout the supply chain. This included a reduction in workforce, and timber harvesting, processing and trade coming to a halt, representing a threat to the social and economic health of the companies working in this area as well as those involved in the production chain. It is estimated that the workforce in the forest sector in the Republic of Congo was reduced by at least 70% (BVRIO-ATIBT, 2020). The reduction in workforce, demand for timber products, international trade, and cash flows in producer countries are all expected to impact incomes at national but also individual levels (FAO, 2020b). Additionally, according to the FAO, the Covid-19 pandemic is negatively affecting not only large-scale companies, but also sustainable forest-based industries producing timber. It suggests that the pandemic will certainly modify production-consumption patterns, particularly affecting especially the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) (FAO, 2020b). As the ILO argues, alongside

disruption within the timber companies, reducing the workforce means reducing incomes and wages, loss of employment and consequently reductions in community incomes and increased pressures on forests (ILO, 2020).

According to an investigative report on Al-Jazeera, international conservation NGOs like the WWF have reported an increase in illegal activities from the Greater Mekong to Madagascar, as the lockdown has diverted attention from law enforcement. The social distancing restrictions have meant fewer patrols are policing and preventing logging crimes (Al-Jazeera, May 2020)². Physical restrictions threaten to reduce the presence of the law enforcement officers and independent forest monitors on the ground. Loss of employment in urban areas has seen thousands of people returning to rural areas. These factors can create and exacerbate the potential for land tenure conflicts, land grabbing and illicit practices, as more and more people turn to forests for immediate solutions to support their livelihoods (FAO, 2020b,c). Similarly, in the Colombian Amazon, a record number of fires were recorded in March and the government has cited increased land grabbing as the main cause, again resulting from weaker enforcement due to the focus on COVID-19. WWF said several of these fires were in the Chiribiquete National Natural Park, the world's largest tropical rainforest national park which was recognised as a World Heritage Site in 2018 (Al-Jazeera, May 2020). According to Conservation International, most African countries are witnessing an alarming increase in bushmeat harvest and wildlife trafficking that is directly linked to COVID-19-related lockdowns, decreased food availability and damaged economies as a result of tourism collapses (Price, 2020).

However, other reports from the Congo Basin region mentioned a strengthening in the community spirit in some of the villages in the face of forest crimes. In Congo, for example, a village chief made it the community's responsibility to seize the equipment of illegal woodcutters, trying to take advantage of the confinement period to illegally cut timber (Fern, 2020).

It is also important to highlight that, according to UN Women, the impacts of crises in general, and this pandemic in particular, are never gender neutral. For many working women, especially poor and

marginalized women, around the world, Covid-19 has meant the loss of their jobs or livelihood: most domestic workers for example found themselves with no job and no social protection scheme to fall back on; the same is true for women with small businesses. UN Women reports that women face a higher risk of COVID-19 transmission and fatalities, loss of livelihood, and increased violence (UN Women, 2020)³. In addition to these difficulties, indigenous women in low- and middle-income countries are most likely to face other problems: Indigenous women continue to face the fatal health impacts of environmental degradation and extractive industries, notably resulting in the pollution of water resources and ancestral agricultural lands, a phenomenon often described by indigenous women as "environmental violence" (UN Women, UNICEF and UNFPA, 2020)⁴. They are also likely to suffer from lack of access to healthcare services, and poorer maternal health (UN Women report, 2020). The report also indicates that the confinement and stay at home orders imposed by most governments have resulted in a rapid escalation of domestic violence, to the shadow pandemic". The existing crisis of violence against women and girls is likely to worsen in the context of COVID-19 accentuated by the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown. (UN Women, 2020)⁵.

² <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/5/7/a-coronavirus-crimewave-how-illegal-loggers-are-profiteering>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>

⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/fact-sheet-indigenous-womens-maternal-health-and-mortality-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1755>

⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>

Methodology of the study

To answer the research questions, this study adopted a mainly quantitative data collection and analysis approach. Data were collected in Cameroon, Republic of Congo and DRC as part of a wider independent forest monitoring and capacity building (CV4C) and RALLF projects delivered in the Congo Basin by the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) and Conservation Justice in Gabon. The CV4C project is implemented in Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo. In each country, we selected project intervention areas where partners have established working relationships with government agencies and forest dependent communities. This social capital was critical to gain the confidence of respondents at a time when there was much concern about exposure to people from capital cities where the pandemic was known to be raging.

In order to gather data, project partners in the three countries, piggybacked the study on an awareness raising campaign conducted as part of the CV4C⁶ project response. Through this campaign, which also included national and community outreach, over 100,000 people were reached including 20,000 forest dependent communities were reached. These communities were provided training on soap making, sanitation and other personal protection equipment (PPE).

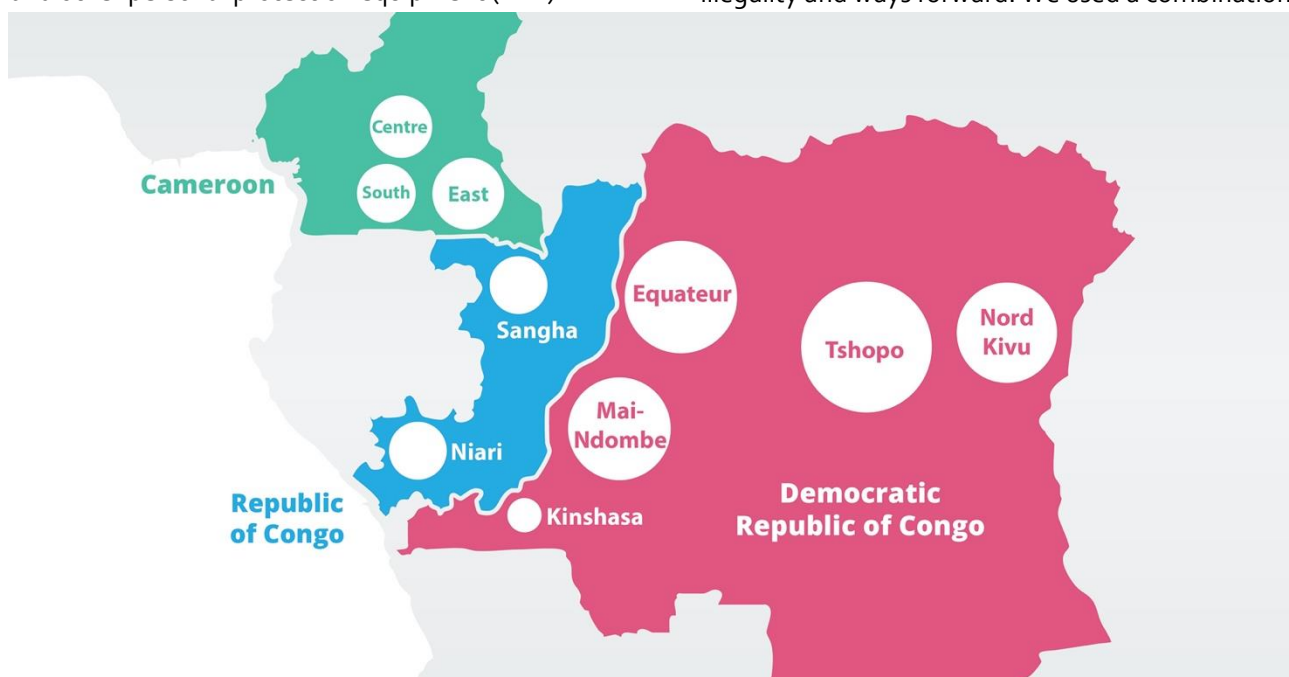
Providing such support to communities greatly facilitated willingness to take part in the survey and produced a very high response rate.

Table 1 shows the study regions in each country.

Table 1: Study areas

Country	Region
DRC	Equateur Kinshasa Mai-Ndombe Nord-Kivu Tshopo
Congo	Sangha Niari
Cameroon	East South Centre Regions

To limit the time required for surveyors to complete the survey, we produced a three-page semi-structured perception questionnaire comprising both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire had five main sections designed to address the research questions: introduction and demographic information, information on Covid-19 impacts on incomes and livelihoods, specific impacts on women, impacts on forest and wildlife illegality and ways forward. We used a combination



⁶ Find out more about the CV4C project here: <https://cidt.org.uk/cv4c/>

of Likert scale questions to assess the perception of respondents on different issues while providing opportunities for respondents to provide explanations for their answers using open ended questions. This enabled the survey to also collect a substantial amount of relevant qualitative data⁷.

Field data collection in all countries took place between May and August 2020. The surveyors were selected by CV4C project partners, namely Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG) and Centre for Environment and Development (CED) in Cameroon, Comptoir Juridique Junior (CJJ) in Congo and Observatoire de la Gouvernance Forestiere (OGF) in DRC. Once selected, the surveyors were briefed on the data collection instrument and further guidance was provided on ethical principles and how to conduct socially distanced interviews. In each community, the surveyors met with local authorities and health officials to inform them about the survey and to gain their approval. In total, 7,000 questionnaires were completed in all three countries as shown in table 2. Following data collection, the questionnaires were reviewed and assessed for completeness. 90% (6,277) of the questionnaires collected were complete and were then transcribed and prepared for analysis. It is important to mention that all the questionnaires were administered in French and the responses were translated into English.

Table 2: Questionnaires administered

Country	Questionnaires administered	Valid questionnaires
Cameroon	1,800	1,562
DRC	5,000	4,606
Congo	150	109
Total	7,000	6,277

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data analytical tools was employed for analysis. We used Nvivo 11 for qualitative data analysis and Microsoft Excel for quantitative data analysis. The Nvivo software allows for classification of data into nodes and themes (Galvao et al., 2020). We adopted a dual approach combining thematic analysis and grounded theory to identify emerging issues from the data. Qualitative information is presented using a combination of quotes and narratives from respondents while visual outputs such as tables and figures are used to illustrate findings.



Findings

About the respondents

Distribution by gender and age

Figures 1, 2, and 3 present the distribution of respondents by gender respectively across the three countries. Despite attempts to achieve a balance in the study, men were more willing to take part in the study than women. For this reason, there are more male respondents in the study than women. In Cameroon, 57% of the respondents were men, 39% were women, while the data were unavailable for 4% of the respondents. In DRC, similarly, 57% of the respondents were men and 43% were women. In Congo, 29% of the respondents were women, while 71% were men.

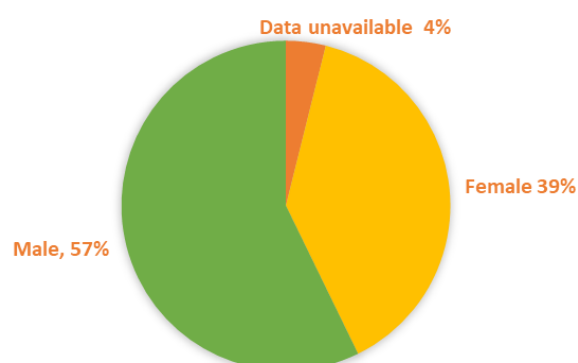


Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by gender in CAM

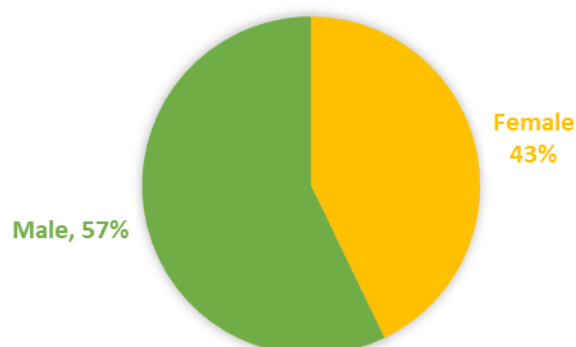


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by gender in DRC

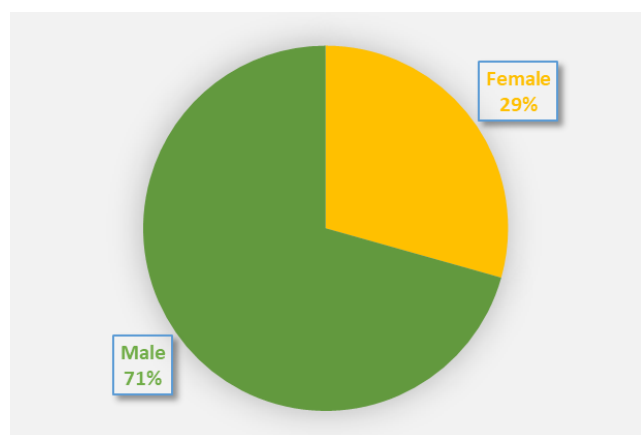


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by gender in Congo

Distribution by profession and main income generating activity

Figures 4, 5 and 6 show the distribution of respondents by profession or main source of income. Starting with DRC, the majority of the respondents identified themselves as involved in some form of trading activity including timber, non-timber forest products, village corner shops, agent middle men amongst others. More female respondents identified as involved in trading compared to all other sources of income. In terms of proportions, this represents 35% compared to 15% who identified as civil servants. 14% were farmers, 10% were employed by the private sector, 17% had different professional activities, and only 9% of the respondents were unemployed. The high number of respondents identifying as traders or involved in some form of commercialisation activities is most likely because the research strategically decided to focus on timber markets in Kinshasa. It was anticipated that those involved in the domestic timber market would provide rich insights into the harvest of timber during the pandemic and its marketing through the ports in Kinshasa.

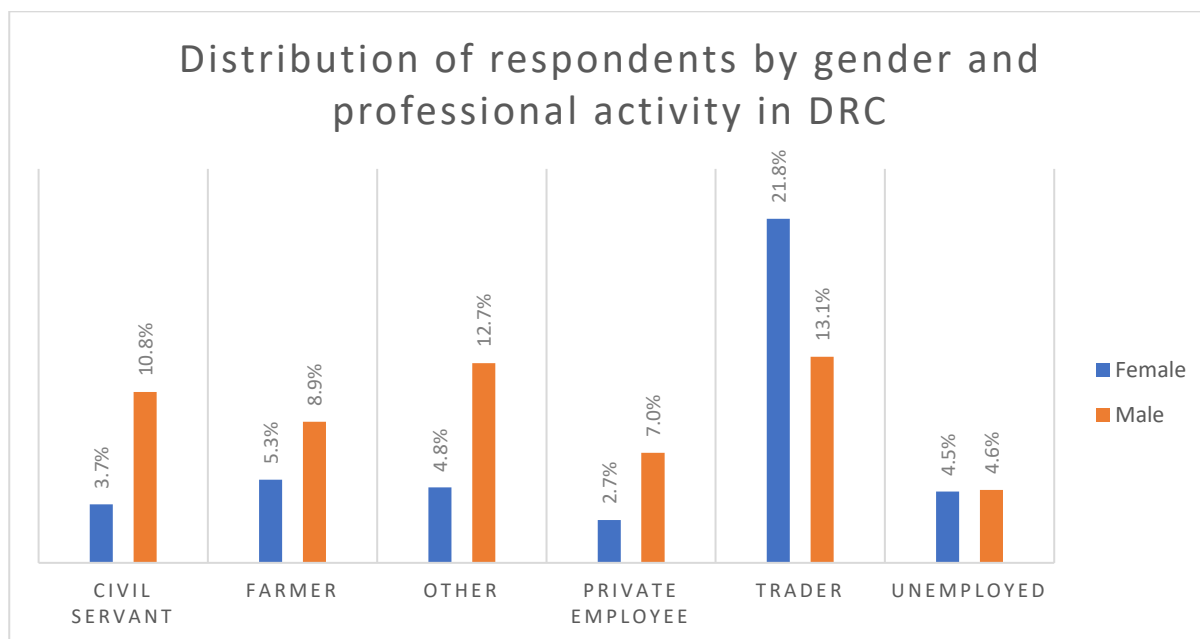


Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by gender and main source of income in DRC

Cameroon had a large percentage of farmers among their respondents, at a rate of 64%, compared with only 3% of civil servants and private sector employees. Figure 5 shows that there were more male respondents in all categories.

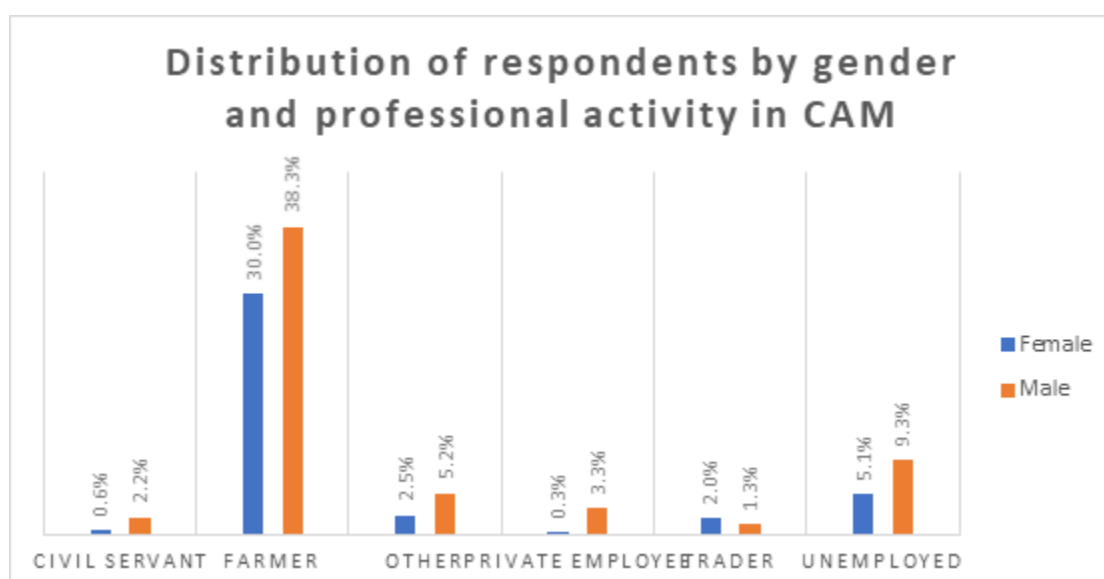


Figure 5: Distribution of respondents by gender and main source of income in Cameroon

As in Cameroon, a majority of respondents were farmers in Congo representing 74% of the respondents. 7% of the respondents in Congo were traders and 7% others were employed by the private sector. There were more male respondents in all income generation categories compared to women as shown in figure 6.

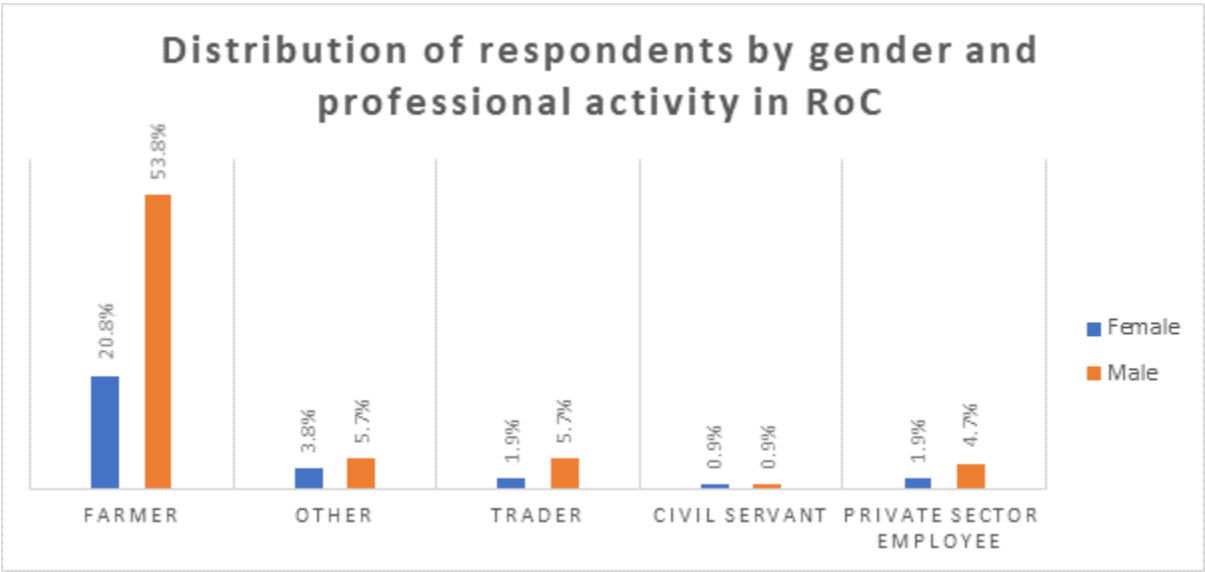


Figure 6: Distribution of respondents by gender and main source of income in Congo

As mentioned earlier, the distribution of respondents shows that the study focused on front line communities and forest dependent communities as shown in the number and share of farmers and those involved in some form of trading/commercial activities. This is the first known study to collect such data at the forest frontier. The following section focuses on perceived impacts of Covid on these communities, starting with impacts on their incomes and livelihoods.

Impact of the pandemic on respondents

Perceived overall impacts on respondents

When asked about perceived impacts of Covid 19 overall on their households, the majority of respondents answered "Yes". As shown in figure 7 and 8, 86% of the respondents in DRC were impacted by the pandemic compared to 58% in Cameroon. In Congo, 97% of the respondents said they had been impacted by the outbreak. In all countries, a higher share of males reported impacts compared to females.

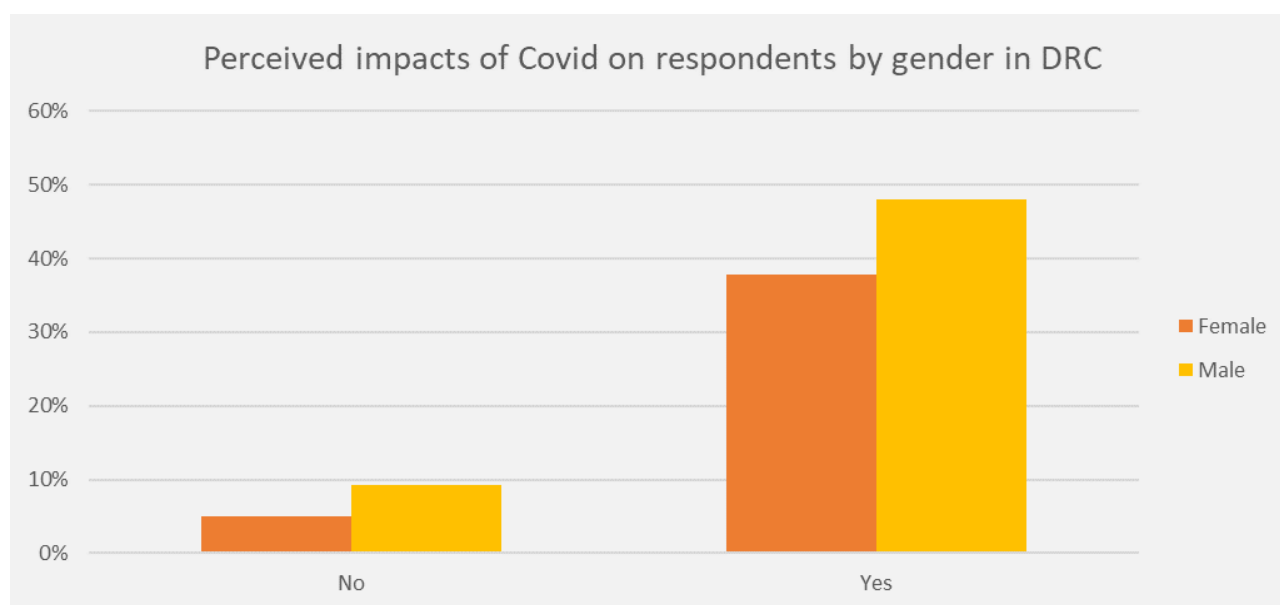


Figure 7: Perceived impacts of COVID in DRC

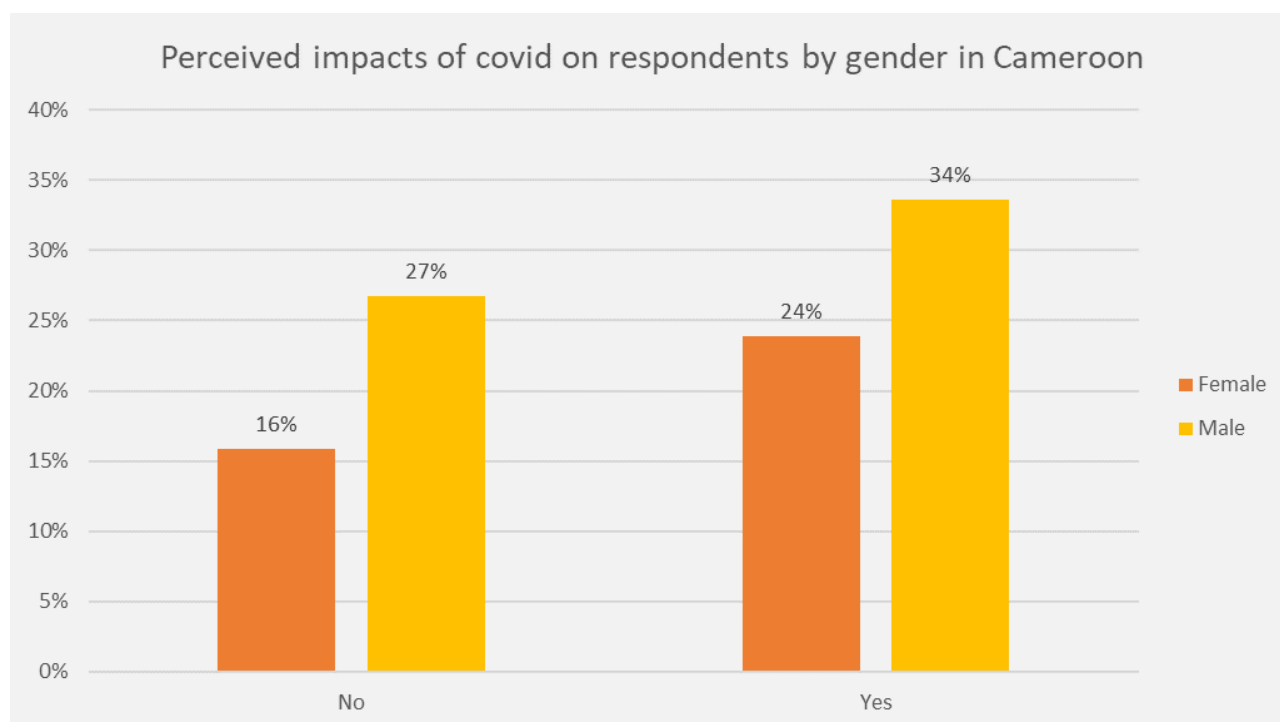


Figure 8: Perceived impacts of COVID in Cameroon

When the data is further disaggregated by main source of income, the pandemic appeared to have a very uneven impact on different categories. For example, in Cameroon, farmers were more likely to report impacts compared to civil servants and traders (figure 9).

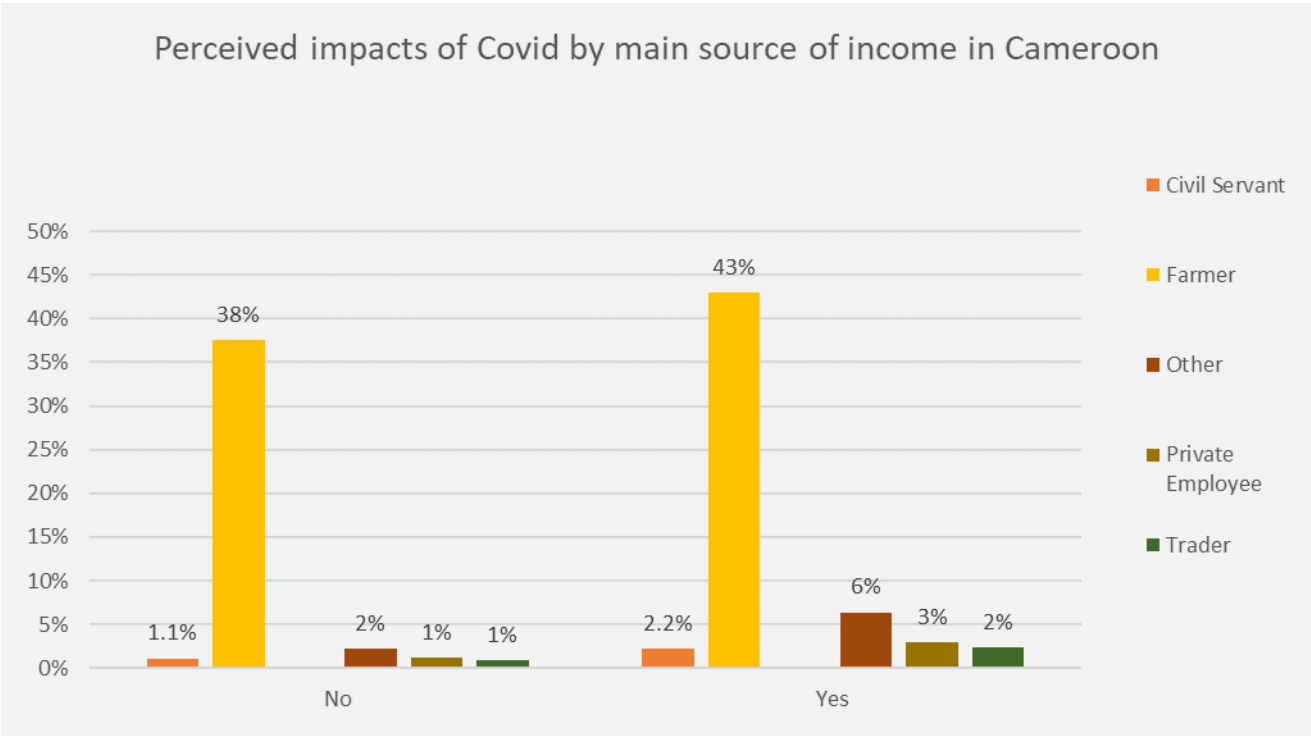


Figure 9: Impact of COVID-19 on respondents by main source of income in Cameroon

In DRC, as those who identified as traders were more likely to report impacts compared to other groups of respondents such as farmers and civil servants (figure 10).

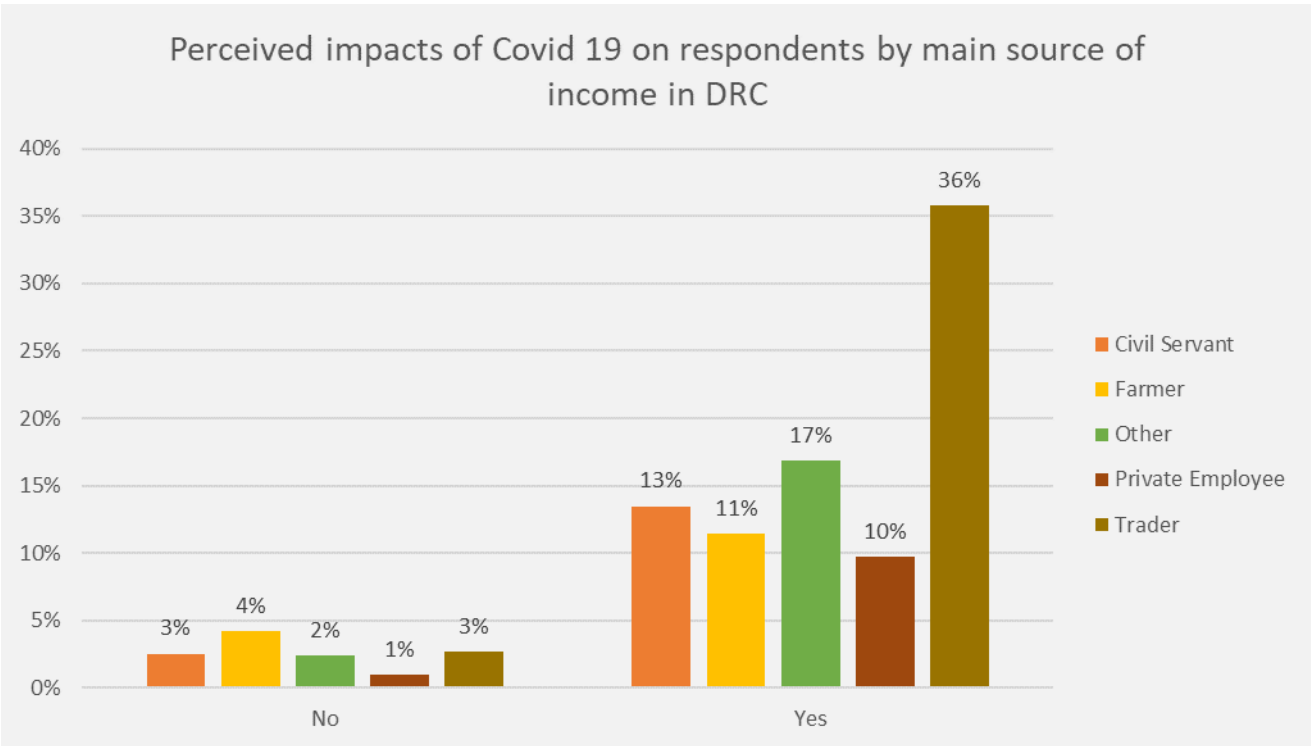


Figure 10: Impact of Covid-19 on respondents by main source of income in DRC

Results in Congo were similar to Cameroon but a significant number of farmers reported impacts compared to other categories (figure 11).

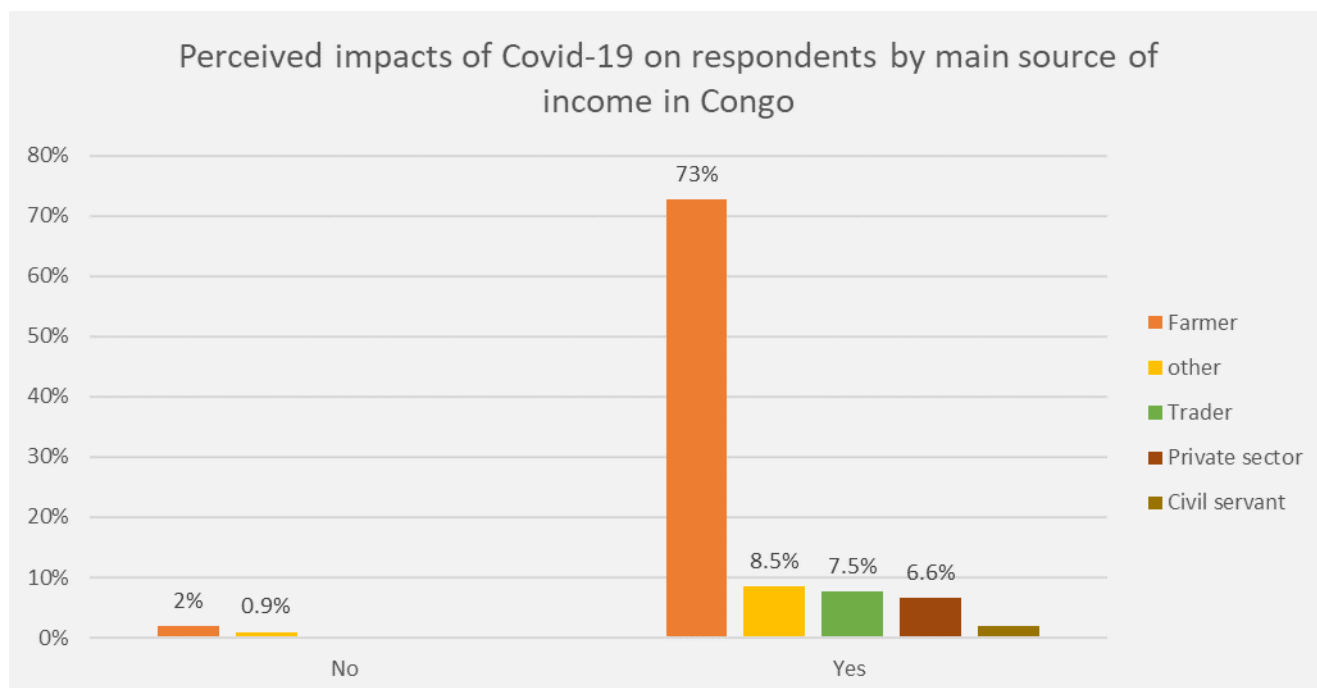


Figure 11: Impact of Covid-19 on respondents by main source of income in Congo

Impacts on Incomes and family

When asked about the nature of the impact 91% of the respondents in Congo reported an income reduction, while up to 8% reported deaths in the family (not always due to the pandemic) and only 1% reported an infection with the virus within their families (figure 12). The questionnaire specified these three main categories of impact, but gave room for the respondents to provide any additional information about any other types of impacts they have felt since the start of the pandemic. A majority of the farmers, as shown in figure 13, have reported losing access to their fields, completely covered by weed, and a destruction of their crops. Case of deaths and infections were also reported not necessarily linked to Covid 19.

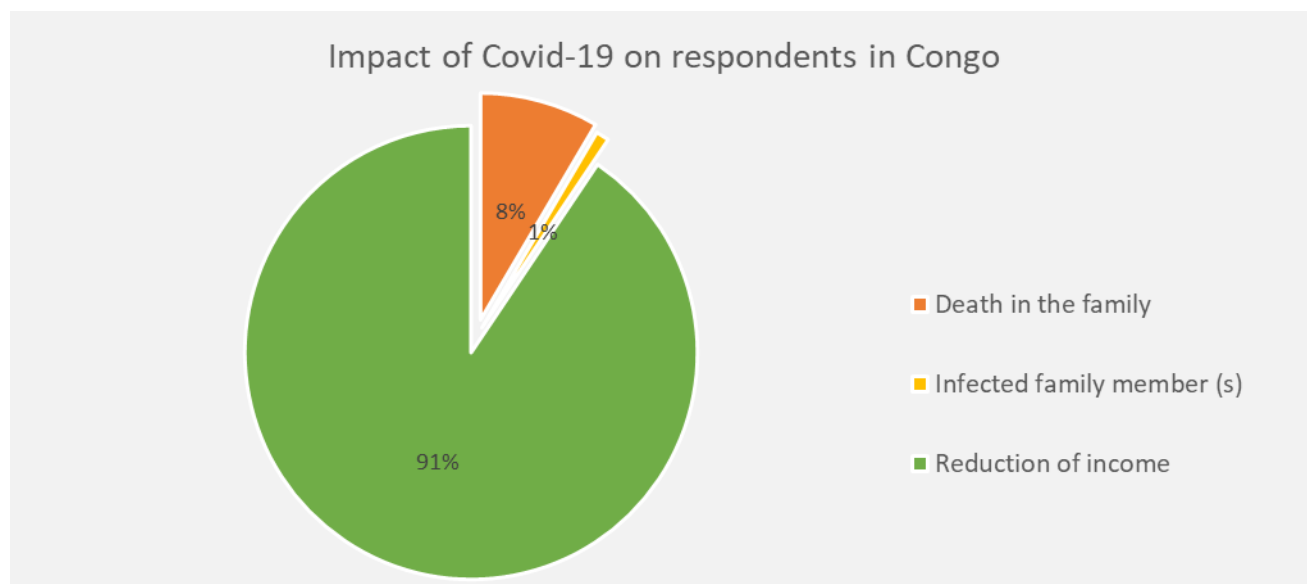


Figure 12: Impact of Covid-19 on respondents in Congo

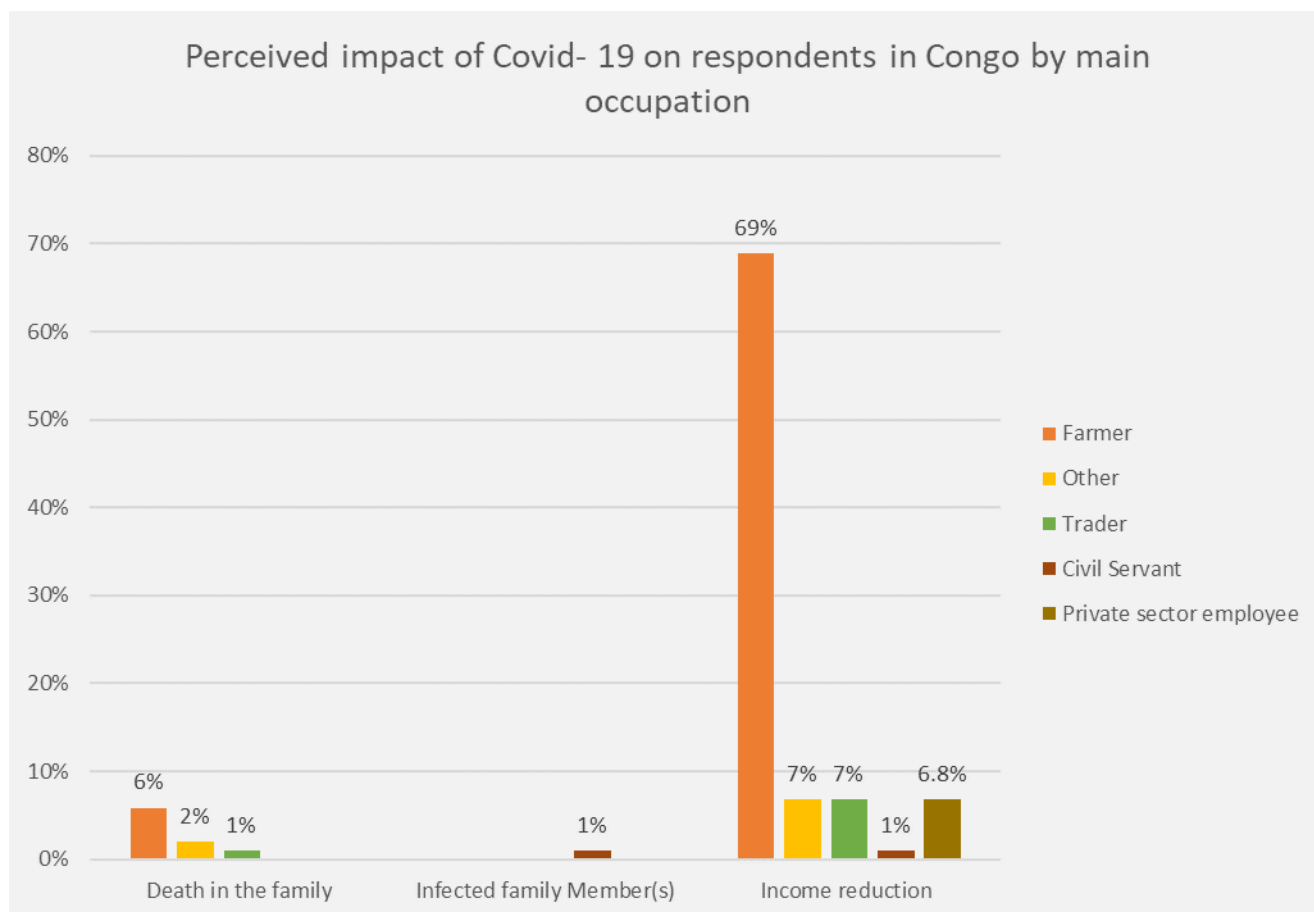


Figure 13: Impact of Covid- 19 on respondents in Congo by professional activity

When disaggregated by gender, figure 14 shows that 85% of respondents reported income losses above 50%. When disaggregated by gender, more males reported this level of loss compared to female respondents.

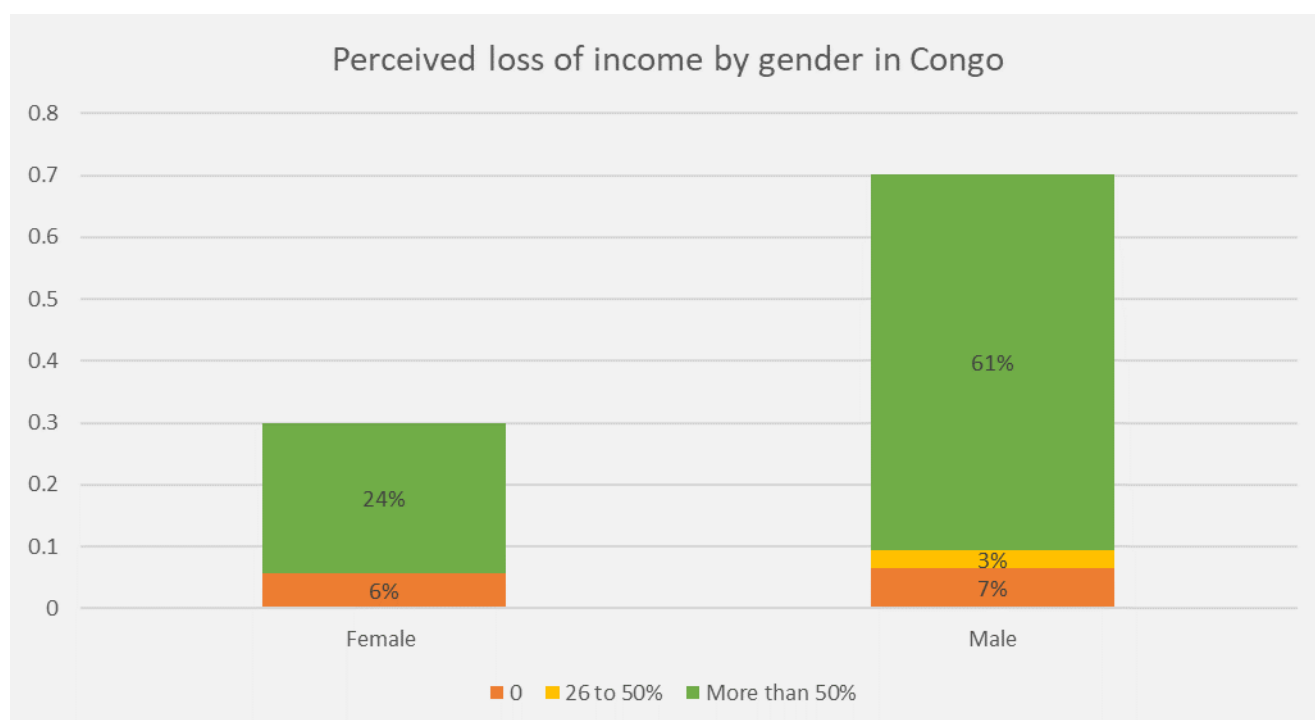


Figure 14: Income loss distribution between men and women in Congo

In DRC, the most significant impact of Covid-19 on the respondents was related to income. A negligible number of respondents reported an infection with the virus or a death in their families (less than 1%), while around 87% of the respondents reported a decrease in their income as shown in figure 15.

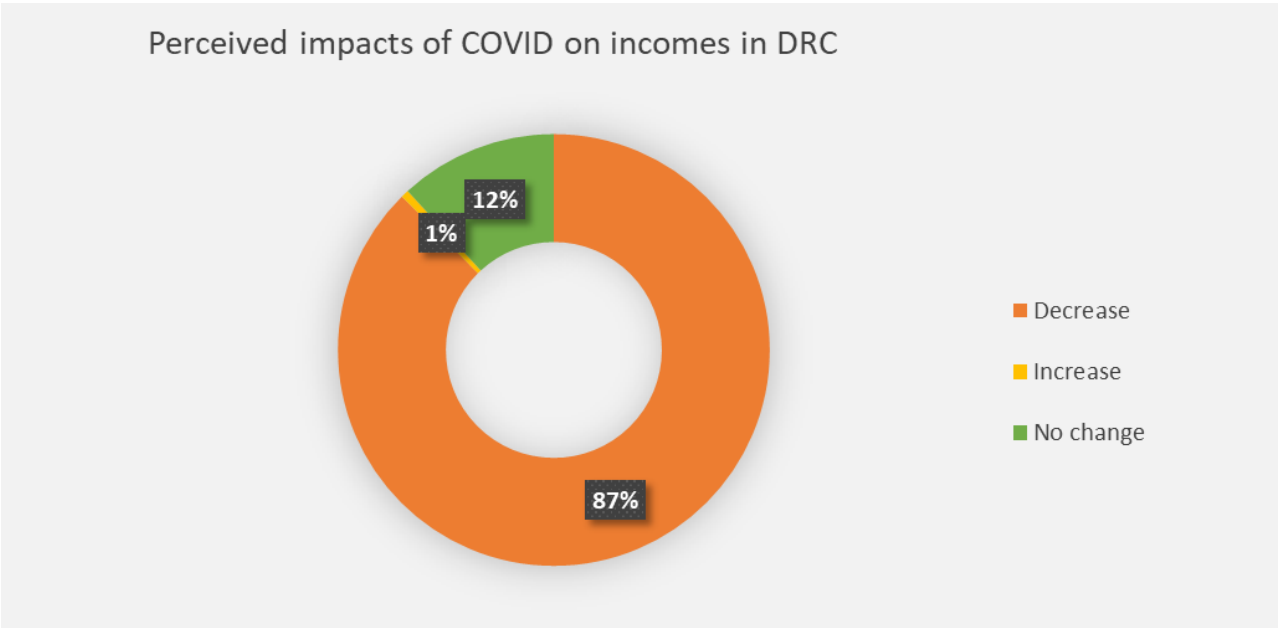


Figure 15: Perceived impacts of COVID on incomes in DRC

When data is disaggregated by gender, figure 16, shows that women in DRC have been more negatively impacted by the pandemic than men when it comes to income loss or reduction. For example, 42% of women respondents reported more than 50% loss in income, compared to a total of 37% of the total male respondents. 37% of women respondents reported a loss of 25-50% of their income in comparison with 36% of the male respondents.

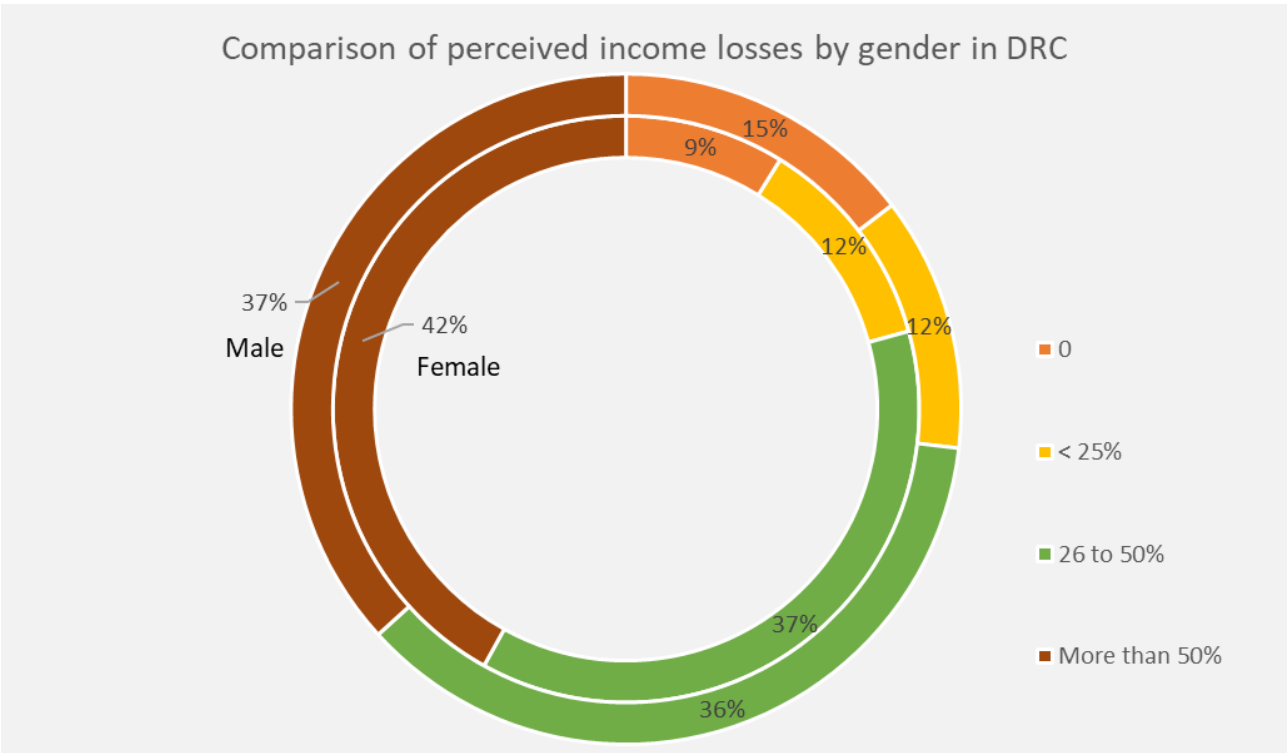


Figure 16: Comparison of perceived income losses by gender in DRC

In Cameroon, a limited number (see figure 16a) cases of infection or death in the family were reported. 100% of respondents in Cameroon reported a decline in incomes.

Impacts of Covid 19 on IPs

To further probe Covid impacts on different responding categories, we evaluated the impacts IPs. The results presented here have been generated from coding of qualitative data collected during the survey. We were specifically interested to assess Covid-19 impacts on respondents self-identifying as IPs. Results in Cameroon showed that of the 513 responses, 26% reported a negative impact on their forest activities (including farming, gathering and hunting for subsistence), whether a decrease or a total cessation. When asked about what they needed, a respondent from Cameroon responded, *"We need food and prayer to face this pandemic"*⁸. 13% reported a noticeable increase in illegal activities in their areas, and likewise, around 13% reported a fear of wild animals, as a reaction to the increase in hunting activities. Also, 9% of the respondents feared that in the aftermath of the pandemic, they would have only limited access to the forest, while 7% feared that they would be denied access altogether. Fig. 17 below, the category presented as "other" reflects a number of lesser fears reported by the indigenous people in Cameroon, which included general uncertainty with regards to the future, a fear of the reduction of wildlife resources, fear of ecological changes and so on. Many respondents stated that they need personal protective equipment (PPE) to be provided to them by the state⁹. Others expressed their need for more *"awareness raising activities by the government and NGOs to the people"*¹⁰. Similarly, another respondent stated *"this pandemic forced us to stay in the forest, so we wouldn't get infected by it"*¹¹.

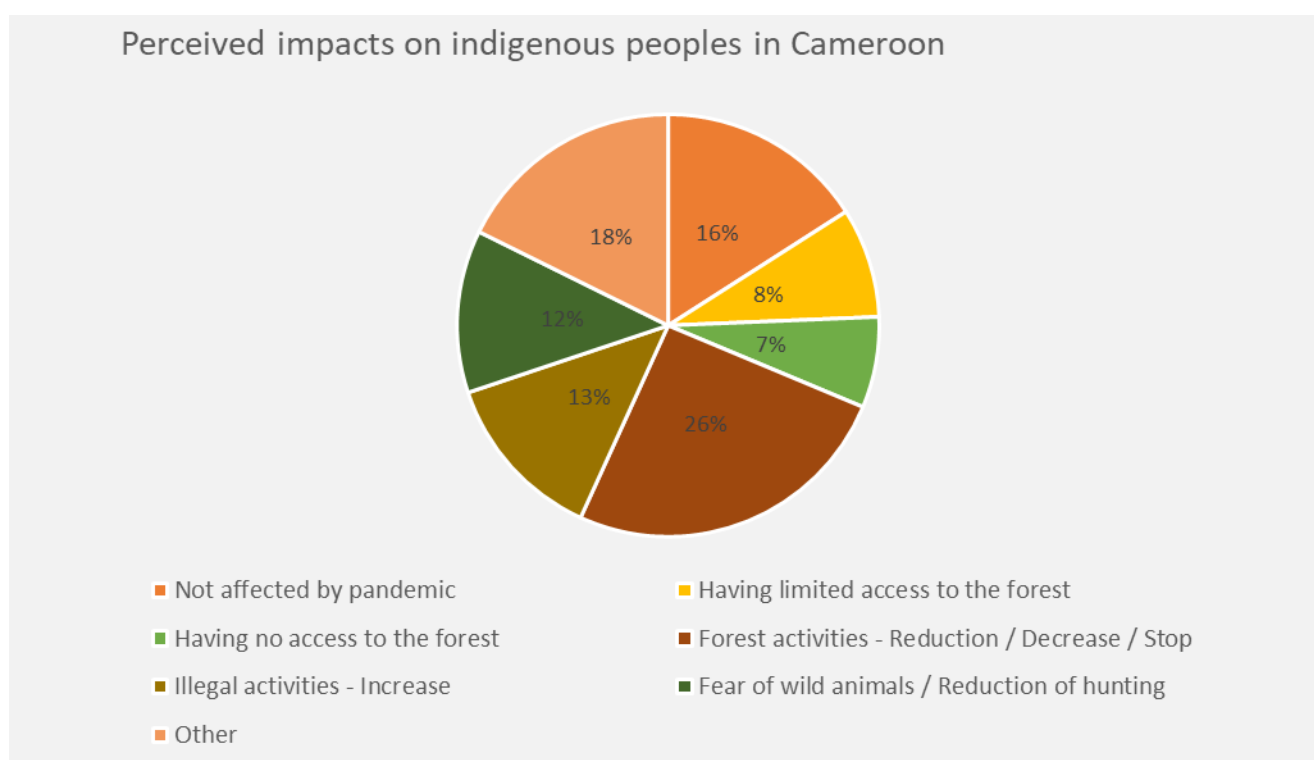


Figure 17: Effect of pandemic on indigenous peoples in Cameroon

In DRC, of the 1349 responses obtained from IPs surveyed, 40% of the respondents reported a decline in their economic activities, particularly linked to lack of market access due to the lockdown measures imposed by the government. Moreover 16% of the respondents reported a decrease or a complete cessation of their forest activities (farming, gathering, and hunting for subsistence ...) and 7% reported a deterioration in their lifestyles. Of the responses received on this topic, 8% revealed that there was no discernible change or impact in their lives caused by the pandemic (figure 18).

⁸ Respondent from Cameroon

⁹ Respondents from Cameroon

¹⁰ Respondent from Cameroon

¹¹ Respondent from Cameroon

Perceived impacts on indigenous peoples in DRC

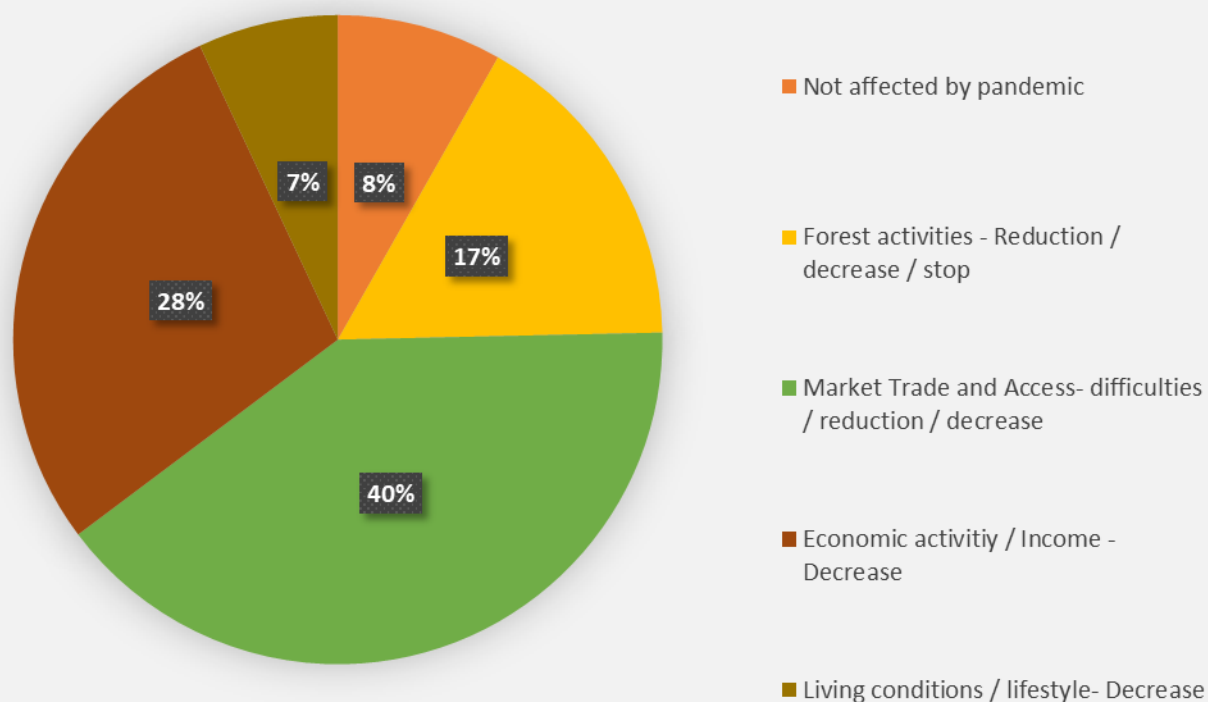


Figure 18: Impacts of pandemic on indigenous peoples and forest dependent communities in DRC

In Congo, 43% of respondents said that indigenous populations were impacted by the loss of food stuff (agriculture) and forest products (including wildlife for consumption). 41% of those that reported a decline in agricultural and forest products, directly attributed it to the confinement measures put in place by the government. 13% of the respondents reported that import and export of products in and out of their local areas was limited due to transportation bans and confinement measures. 22% of respondents described the government restrictions as 'harsh' and 'brutal'. The survey also found cases of domestic violence (2%) (an issue we will elaborate in the following paragraphs) as well as declines in savings (2%). See figure 19.

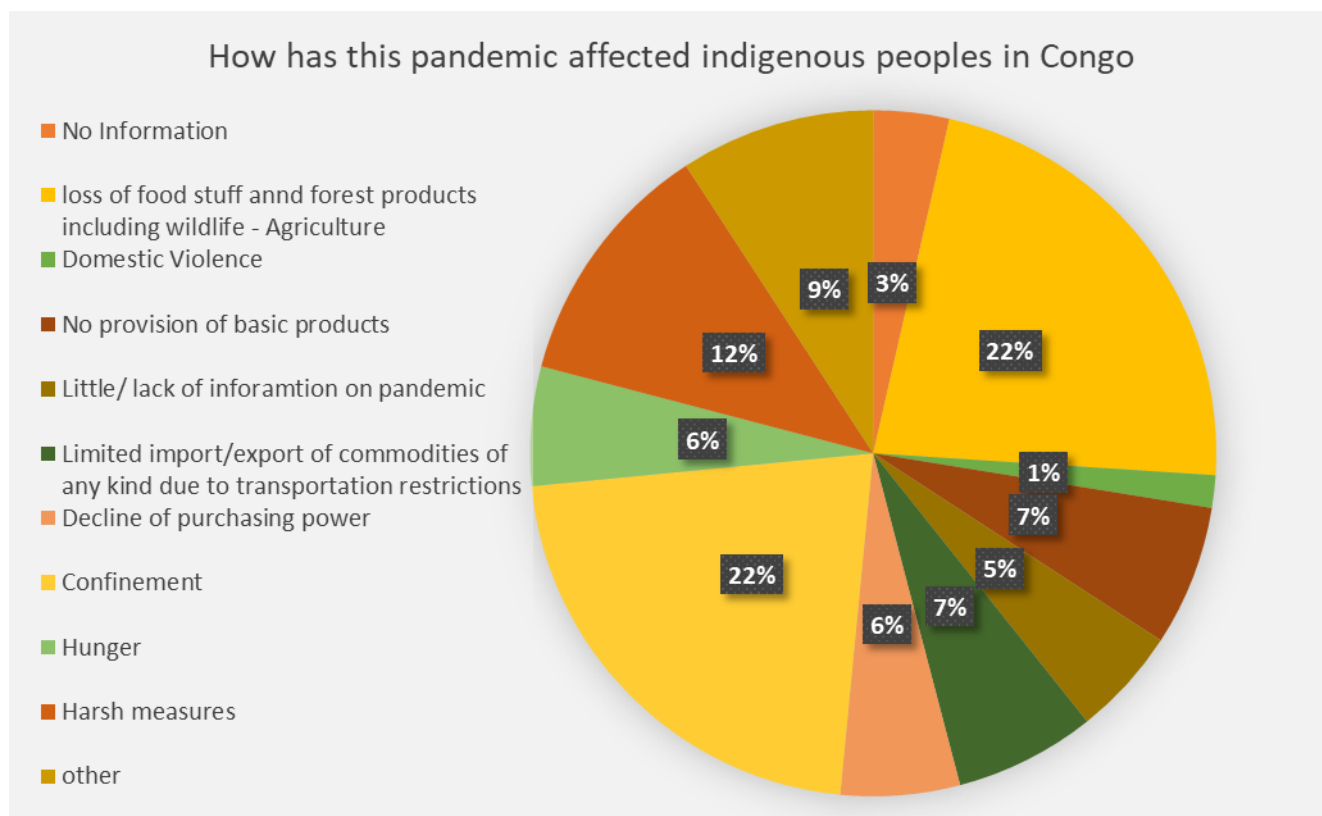


Figure 19: Impacts on indigenous peoples in Congo

In Congo, it was especially noticeable that most of the respondents, men and women, complained about the lack of awareness or information available on the virus, and how to best protect themselves and their families against it. They explicitly asked the government and civil society organisations to intervene both in providing awareness raising, PPE and other hygienic products (like face masks, gloves and soap bars) for their communities, because they could not afford to pay for it themselves. A farmer among the respondents said *"people must be given information; the government seems to have resigned or given up on us. It is its duty! It should raise the awareness of the people, give them masks, especially us in the forestry areas"*¹². Another respondent from Koukbésséné village in Congo agreed *"The government should think of informing people about lockdown measures. We should be involved in this"*¹³.

Strict lockdown measures were not the only cause for complaint amongst forest adjacent communities in Congo, but also the brutality of their implementation by law enforcement agents. A farmer among the respondents reported *"This is what I am telling you, my products were burnt down by the police"*¹⁴. Another farmer also said, *"We have been brutally confined, with no information, no support, the police prevented us from moving, even to transport sick people to the hospital to the point that we had many deaths"*¹⁵.

Most respondents in Congo also emphasised their dire need for some sort of assistance, mostly financial but also technical. As a trader from Kikassa village in Congo highlighted *"I need financial assistance to rebuild my capital. The government should have pity on us. We should also feel like they care about us"*¹⁶. According to respondents, most of them lost their agricultural products due to the lockdown measures imposed by the government, as they were prevented from going to the fields. Their crops were completely ruined or overgrown by weeds by the end of the lockdown. As highlighted by a woman farmer from Congo *"The government has prevented us from this or that activity. Now fields are covered with weeds; we don't have any other way to live"*¹⁷.

¹² Respondent from Congo

¹³ Respondent from Congo

¹⁴ Respondent from Congo

¹⁵ Respondent from Congo

¹⁶ Respondent from Congo

¹⁷ Respondent from Congo

What are the social impacts of the pandemic? A special focus on women

Having explored the impacts on IPs generally in the three countries, we then evaluated the specific impacts on women and what needed doing to address their concerns. The following section highlights the proposals which emerged from respondents.

When asked to describe the impact of the pandemic on their income or business, results from qualitative data analysis, shows that 37% of the female respondents in DRC reported a decrease of their economic or income-generating activities because of the pandemic and the lockdown measures imposed by the government. 12% reported being affected by currency depreciation and a decrease in their purchasing power. 11% stated they had difficulty in taking charge of their household expenses, while 18% mentioned a decrease in clientele and reduced trade. 6% of the respondents reported difficulty in selling and moving goods, due to the lockdown measures, which cut off their access to local markets. Only 15% of the respondents stated that the pandemic had no impact on their income. Most of the respondents said that they required some form of assistance from the government, either financial or technical, or through job creation and funding for small and micro projects for these communities. Many also stressed that NGOs need to play a role in *“providing support and trainings for these forest dependent communities, to help them improve their quality of lives”*¹⁸. Other respondents also highlighted their need for awareness- raising about the pandemic and PPE to be provided to them either by NGOs or by the government¹⁹. See figure 20.

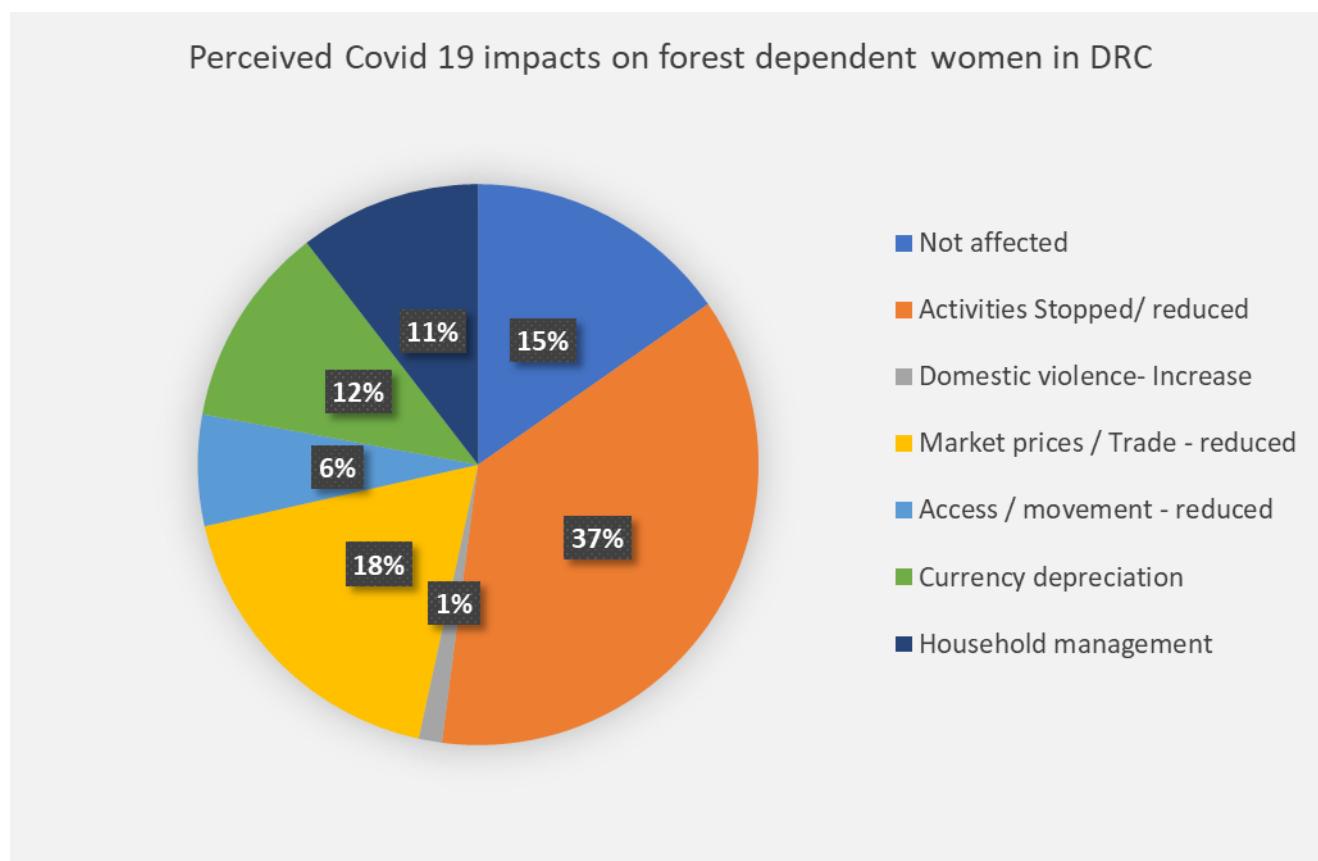


Figure 20: Impacts on forest dependent women in DRC

¹⁸ Respondent from DRC

¹⁹ Respondents from DRC

In Congo, 45% of respondents reported that the impact felt most by women was the loss of agricultural and forest products. 8% reported that as a result of decreased produce, they and their families experienced hunger. Increased domestic violence was reported by 6% of survey respondents (see fig. 21). In addition to this increase in domestic violence, other female respondents from Congo raised a number of other gender-related problems. The data collected clearly suggests that women from those communities have suffered more negative consequences of the pandemic. Gender-based violence, sexual harassment and sometimes even rape, have been reported by some of the respondents. A farmer from Congo told our research team *"I have been a victim of rape in broad daylight! I went to the police to report this but nothing! I am now afraid of being around other people"*²⁰. Some of the respondents admitted that they resort to sex work to feed their families, having completely lost their previous sources of income.

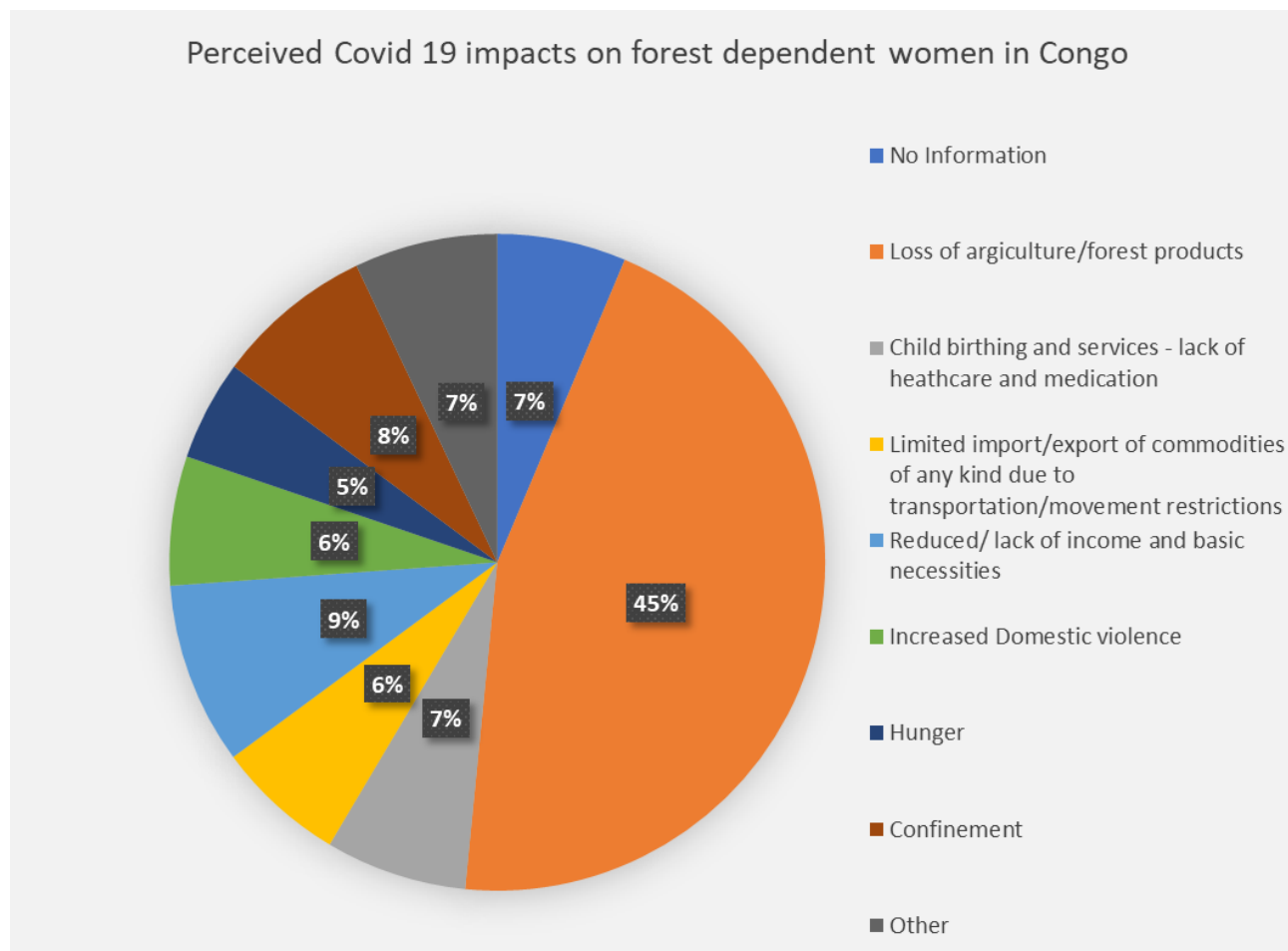


Figure 21: Impact of the pandemic on forest dependent women in Congo

Women respondents from the IPCLs in Cameroon were similarly affected by the reduction or complete stop of their economic activities (33%), while 16% reported an increase in the market prices, 16% others reported a decrease of clientele or a reduction in their trade. As one of the respondents expressed *"Women can no longer go to the market and sell their products"*. 10% of the women experienced a decrease in their purchasing power and 9% said they were struggling with managing their household expenses during the pandemic. Other respondents talked about other negative impacts of the pandemic, such as fear of infection, mental health struggles due to isolation, and decrease in communal work as shown in figure 22. Many of the respondents in Cameroon described the situation by saying *"They stopped all women gatherings"* or *"Now we can't do the activities we used to do together anymore."* Also, one of the respondents gave a description of how women struggle to manage their household's expenses *"Husbands are suffering, wives must now increase their efforts to feed the family alone"*²¹. This suggests that the pandemic could be increasing burdens on women who are already known to bear the social and productive roles in households.

²⁰ Respondent from Congo

²¹ Respondent from Cameroon

Perceived Covid 19 impacts on forest dependent women in Cameroon

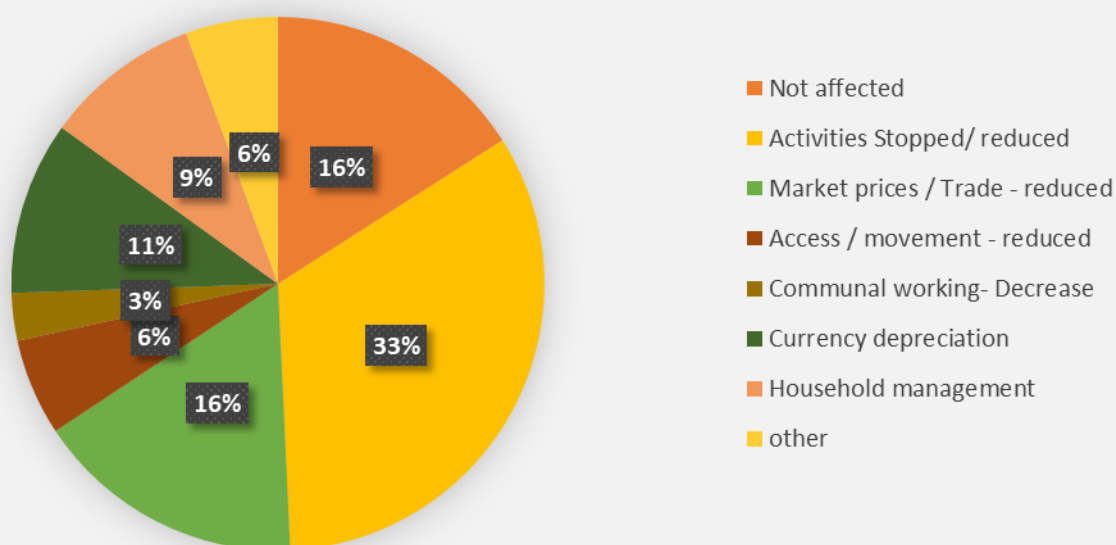


Figure 22: Impact on forest dependent women in Cameroon

It is also noteworthy that a small but still significant number of respondents in both all countries cases of domestic violence caused by the pandemic. It is highly likely, for various reasons, that this percentage conceals the true scale of this issue. Firstly, it is well-established worldwide that most victims of domestic violence are often reluctant or ashamed of reporting it or speaking about it to others (WHO, 2002). Secondly, many studies and media platforms have documented a "worldwide increase" in domestic violence during the pandemic. As already mentioned, UN Women went as far as to describe the worldwide increase in domestic abuse as a "shadow pandemic" alongside Covid-19 (UN Women, 2020). A report by Deutsche Welle in October 2020, indicated that many African countries have seen an unprecedented rise in GBV: For example, Liberia recorded a 50% increase in gender-based violence in the first half of this year. Nigeria also saw an increase of sexual violence during the curfews. Two cases in June, in which young women were raped and killed, shocked the country. In Kenya, local media reported almost 4,000 schoolgirls becoming pregnant when schools were closed during the lockdown. In most cases they had allegedly been raped by relatives or police officers (DW, Oct. 2020)²². A UNDP study found that the Central African Republic (CAR) is seeing an unprecedented surge in gender-based violence (GBV) since the COVID-19 virus pandemic and measures to control it began, with reported injuries to women and children spiking by 69% (UNDP, May 2020).

Adaptive measures by forest dependent communities

When it comes to adaptive measures in the face of the pandemic, the number of respondents who had a plan to cope or a set of adaptive measures varied significantly between countries. Here, we adopted a wide definition of "adaptive measures", letting to include all changes in behaviour facing the pandemic. This includes hygienic measures like wearing face coverings, washing hands, or in social behaviour like social distancing and avoiding large crowds. But, we also intended to find out about the changes in the respondents' economic behaviour, such as their consumption and how they managed their expenses in the face of this sharp decline of income. The data collected from the respondents in the three countries reflected a confusion, since most of the respondents understood that we only meant the first two aspects. In DRC for example, the survey results revealed (figure 23) that almost 39% of the respondents did not have any adaptive measures, while 26% resorted to alternatives activities to compensate for a drop in incomes. About 13% of the respondents resorted to a reduced lifestyle, sometimes giving up on essential goods and services like food, or as noted by one of the

²² <https://www.dw.com/en/africa-pandemic-violence-rape-women/a-55174136#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20cases%20of,during%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic.&text=The%20United%20Nations%20has%20called,across%20Africa%20and%20the%20globe.>

respondents “We eat very badly”²³. Dependence on family support (1%) or indebtedness (1%) were also reported as actions taken to deal with the effects of the epidemic. It is noteworthy that only 18% of the respondents were concerned by the hygienic measures against the virus, like wearing face masks or handwashing.

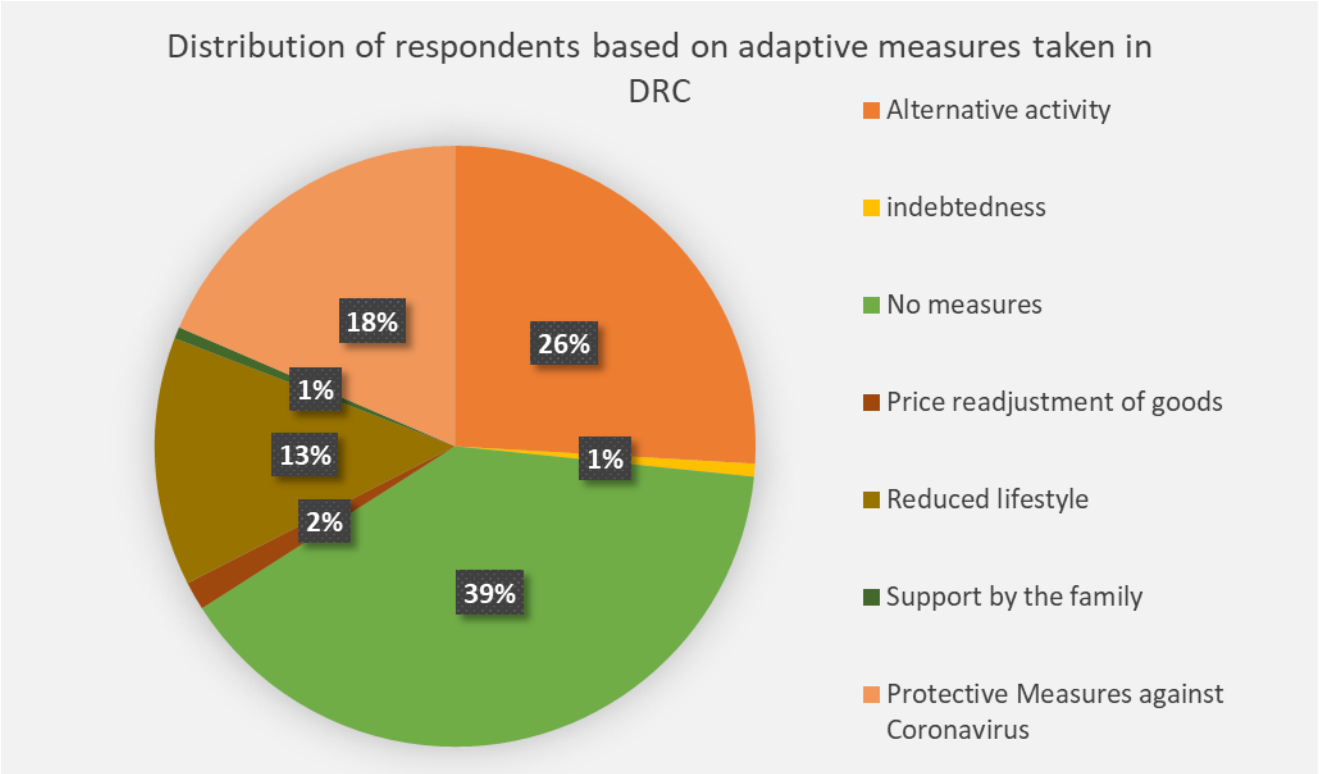
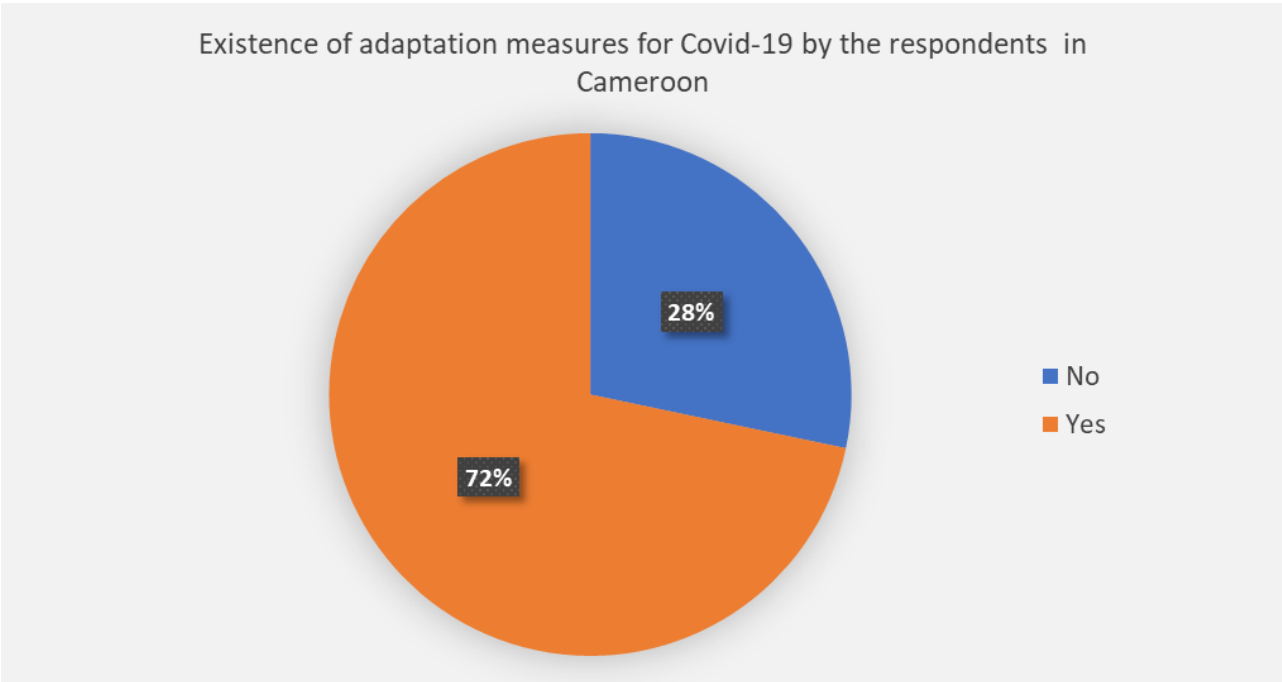


Figure 23: Distribution of respondents based on adaptive measures taken in DRC

For both Cameroon and Congo, this level of detailed data is not available given the quality of the evidence collected on this specific topic. However, only 28% of the respondents in Cameroon and Congo (see figure 24 and 25) reported not having any measures to deal with the crisis. In Cameroon, respondents said they were using preventative measures such as washing hands, wearing face coverings, social distancing and so on.



²³ DRC respondent

Figure 24: Existence of adaptation measures for Covid-19 by the respondents in Cameroon

It is also important to note that most of the respondents who didn't have any adaptive measures in place in Cameroon explained this by not having sufficient information about the pandemic or how to face it. *"We are not sure what to do"*²⁴, was a sentiment expressed by many of the respondents. Other responses included *"this virus only affects white people"*²⁵, and *"we live in the forest, we will not be affected by this illness"*²⁶, reflecting the need for more information and awareness- raising about the pandemic.

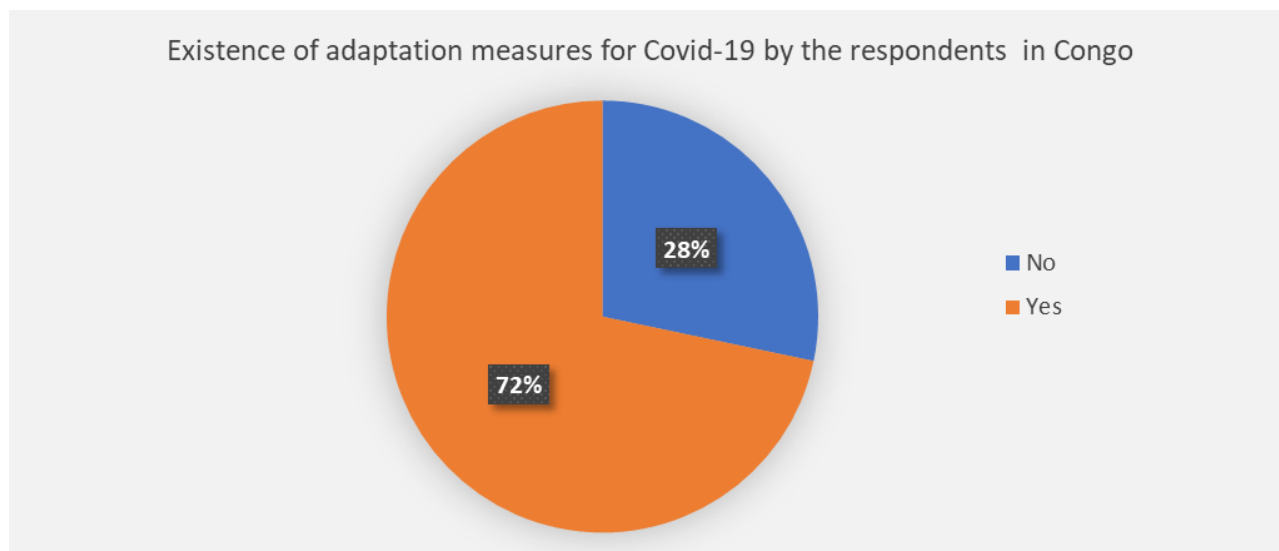


Figure 25: Existence of adaptation measures for Covid-19 by the respondents in ROC

Of the 28% who did mostly responded that they *"went back to their fields to resume work"*²⁷. Some others considered that *"washing hands, wearing face coverings and respecting social distancing"* is a good adaptive measure against the pandemic. Other respondents, especially women, admitted that they *"eat very badly in an attempt to sort ourselves out"*²⁸.

²⁴ Respondent from Cameroon

²⁵ Respondent from Cameroon

²⁶ Respondent from Cameroon

²⁷ Respondents from Congo

²⁸ Respondent from Congo

Proposed actions to address the impacts of Covid-19

When asked what actions need to be taken and by whom, respondents identified communities themselves, government, international agencies/actors and non-governmental organisations as key stakeholders to address the Covid-19 impacts. Table 3 shows the responses derived from the qualitative data.

Table 3: How to address Covid-19 impacts on IPLCs and women

Proposed actions	Number of coding references
A: Community action	
Communities to protect themselves	175
Confinement and other control measures	266
Spiritual and traditional beliefs	52
B: Government Support	
Control and enforcement	153
Coordinate with stakeholders	48
Create health centres and services	11
Research	29
Vaccine	356
C: Role of international and NGO support	67
D: Support to Communities	
Financial and material support	53
Healthcare and medical support	35
Price control of products	3
Provide jobs	55
Sensitise communities and provide PPE	158
Total	1461

Source: Nvivo data analysis output



A: Community action

The actions identified here are things which communities thought they could do themselves to address the impacts of the pandemic in their communities. As several respondents stated, *"One has to take personal precautions and respect the rules of hygiene"*. This included for several others, moving into the forests to separate themselves from others. Others suggested that, *"The populations themselves must mobilise to deal with this and the state must support them"*. This suggests a willingness to work within communities to find ways to solve their collective problems. Support to community mobilisation could therefore be beneficial in finding solutions that address the needs of communities. Additionally, a significant number of respondents stated the importance of respecting government guidelines on confinement and control measures:

"Apply all barrier methods prescribed by partners, governments and NGOs."

"People need to continue to wear the masks and respect the barrier measures"

"It is only the respect of barrier measures that everyone must respect."

"Everyone is called upon to respect the conditions for breaking the chain of contamination"

"Each person must take responsibility for stopping the disease".

This clearly shows a high level of ownership of the actions that communities can take themselves but also respect for government guidelines. In addition to these aspects, respondents attributed a spiritual dimension to addressing the challenges of the pandemic through dependence on religious and traditional beliefs. This emphasises the need for a culturally sensitive approach to addressing pandemics targeting IPLCs and forest dependent communities, including fighting misinformation about pandemics:

"Apply all the barrier methods taken by government and that people believe in God and pray a lot"

"Rites and our dead ancestors will be able to drive out this plague."

"Raise awareness, follow modern treatments and traditional pharmacopoeia."

"Elaboration of indigenous remedies by traditional doctors."

"Turn to traditional medicine."

"Kill all the witches and whites who created the disease."

"Grandparents who know about native traditional medicines and tree barks will solve it".

B: Government Support

Regarding the role of government, table 3 shows that a majority of respondents thought that government should play a critical role in the research, development and distribution of the vaccine and medicines to communities. This also includes setting up health centres and services to support communities during epidemics. This is crucial considering the lack of functional and effective health systems in the Congo Basin. Respondents also stressed the need for government to coordinate with other stakeholders in the process of providing support or addressing the impacts of the pandemic. For instance, statements such as *"government has to create centres in the communities to help population"*; *"the government must increase the number of patient care centres"*, show the need for more decentralised approaches to health care. Furthermore, other respondents suggested that these centres need to be equipped and ready for future pandemics. In addition to prioritising the role of vaccines and medicines, respondents suggested

that stronger control and law enforcement by the state was crucial in mitigating the impacts of Covid-19 on communities. This includes extreme cases such as arrests, sanctions of recidivists but also, interestingly, confinement with support measures. Unfortunately, evidence suggests that scant support was provided to communities in all project countries.

"The government must arrest of all those who are infected with the virus in order not to spread it for risk of contamination."

"The population needs to be confined, giving them necessary means."

"The state should make it compulsory for all to take measures to prevent the entry , with sanctions for those who do not comply."

"Barrier measures should be mandatory and sanctioned in the case of recidivists".

C: International and NGO support

4% of the responses coded shown in table 3 were linked to the potential role of international governments, agencies and NGO in the Covid-19 response. Regarding international agencies, respondents demanded a role for the World Health Organisation to work with governments to find a vaccine and cure for the disease. Additionally, China was frequently cited as being part of the solution, considering the disease is reported to have emerged from there, with one respondent saying: *"The Chinese should find a way themselves to solve the*

problem".. NGO support was the most requested form of support in this category. Respondents suggested that NGOs needed to play a stronger role because governments are very slow to act. Others requested NGO support to sensitise communities and raise awareness while working with governments to find medical solutions. The following section highlights the main areas of support requested.

D: Support to Communities

In addition to the role that could be played by communities themselves, government, international agencies and NGOs, IPLCs identified a number of other potential forms of support. Table 3 indicates that awareness raising, sensitisation and personal protective equipment were the most important needs identified by respondents. The following quotes emphasise these views:

"The state must do everything, raise awareness, educate, educate the community and take care of victims."

"Health personnel [should] descend on the field to do screening and sensitisation."

"Sharing of treatment and protective equipment."

"Establish local committees to combat COVID-19 by the government and local NGOs."

"NGOs and the government should share protection materials in the village."

"The State and NGOs must distribute the protection material and set a market price for cocoa to help us to continue to operate".

These statements not only show the need for awareness raising and equipment support, but also suggest the need for stakeholders to support the establishment of local committees to combat the pandemic. Providing such community support could enhance community resilience and even build preparedness for future pandemics. Interestingly, price support is also highlighted as a need by respondents. Respondents suggest that the state should support price reduction or ensure that prices for products are maintained in the face of spikes in the prices of essential goods in communities.

Not surprisingly the need for financial and material support, as well as jobs, were the most commonly cited needs from communities, after sensitisation and equipment. This support would help

communities to relaunch their activities and improve their living conditions. The needs can be summarised in the following quotes from respondents:

"Their income generating activities need to be funded."

"Provide food and economic resources."

"The government needs to provide funding so that we can get back on track."

"Bring the material and sources of funding from NGOs."

"Financing to relaunch our activities."

"Women don't do too many meetings or markets anymore, we need help."

"To restart our activities the State and the NGOs can help us".

The question now remains, what types of activities and concrete support/modalities would work best. Engaging communities and women in these reflections would ensure that post Covid resilience investments target specific needs in culturally and gender sensitive ways.

Finally, communities identified the need for health and medical support for communities that have been affected by the disease. As already mentioned, communities suggested the establishment of responsive community health centres; however, here, the focus is specifically on treatment needs. As one of the respondents said, "*The state has to take full care of victims and rapid reporting of cases*" while another stated that, "*It is necessary [to provide] a specific treatment of those infected by the disease in big hospitals through researchers, scientists and indigenous people*".

The following section focuses on the perceived impacts of the pandemic on forest and wildlife governance.

Perception of forest illegality in the Congo Basin

This study was conducted as part of the civil society led independent forest monitoring project by the University of Wolverhampton in the Congo Basin. We were therefore particularly interested in the question of whether forest and wildlife illegality would worsen during the pandemic and what measures were required to mitigate or address emerging impacts. This section therefore looks at perceived levels of forest control by the administration, forest illegality and illegal wildlife trade.

Perception of official forest control agents on the ground

Government forest control represents a sovereign law enforcement responsibility. The study therefore asked frontline communities to share their perceptions of government presence and control activities on the ground during the pandemic. Findings in figure 26 show that in Cameroon, 62% of respondents thought that there were 'fewer' to 'far fewer' controls and presence of officials on the ground during the pandemic, while 16% stated that there was no change. Only 22% of the respondents thought that the forest control became tighter or far tighter during the pandemic.

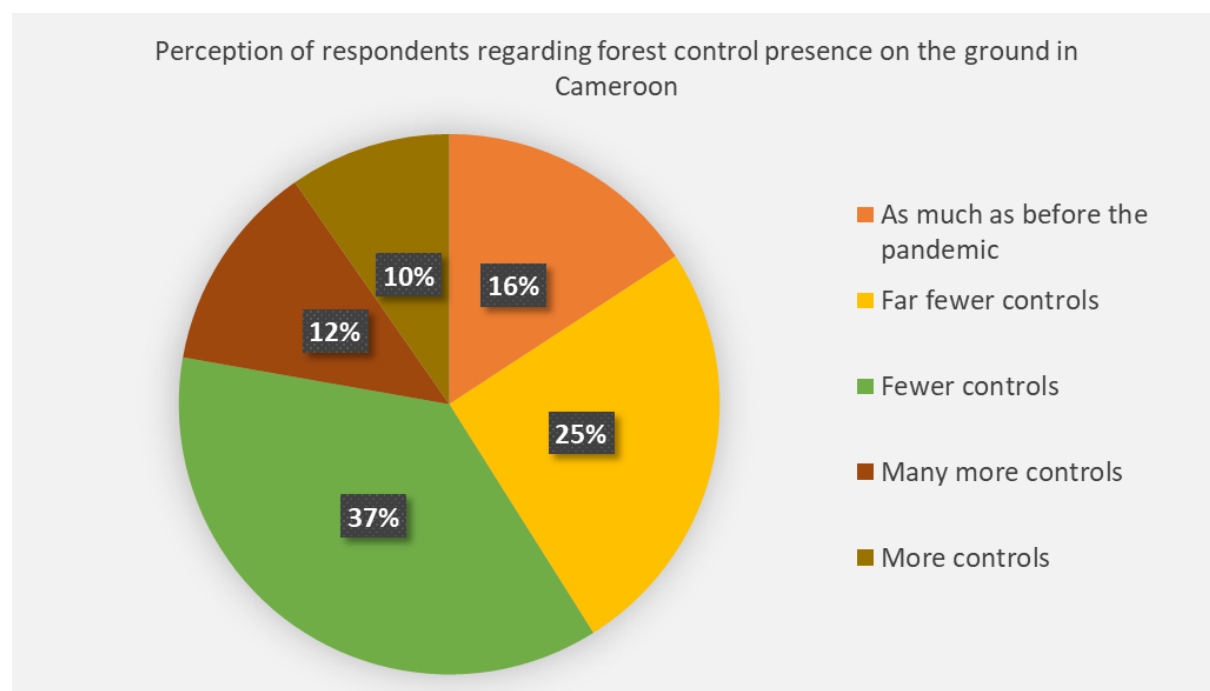


Figure 26: Perception of respondents regarding forest control presence on the ground in Cameroon

When asked why they felt in that way, respondents believed that it is mainly due to the corruption of the forest control agents. One respondent mentioned evidence of *"complicity of the departmental head of forests by the company [company name was removed]"*²⁹. Additionally, several Cameroonian respondents said: *"There is no control here."*

"Controllers never enter the forest."

"We are witnessing a decrease in the number of people, almost no control at all."

²⁹ Respondent from Cameroon

Other number of respondents from Cameroon told our research team that the situation hasn't changed much before or after the pandemic. In both cases, they were extremely critical of the lack of efficiency of the governmental agents. For example:

"There was no change, the rangers are only at the station, that's where we see them more now".

"Before COVID-19, the forests were not really monitored, with the confinement it became more worrying".

"Before the Corona virus, the forest rangers did nothing at all, with the Corona all became worse."

"We don't see them as before, we could see them in the vehicles".

In DRC, 74% of the respondents reported a deterioration in the presence of official government forest control agents on the ground (figure 27). One respondent explained, *"This control is limited only to the various ports of the town of Mbandaka, but not within the province; there is a lack of inspectors."*³⁰. Asked why they felt that there had been such limited presence of officials, the following sentiments were expressed:

"Administration does not do anything despite the state of the pandemic".

"Everyone is afraid of the diseases and prefers to stay at home."

"They control but there is still deforestation and poaching".

"Everything has been stopped since the arrival of the pandemic".

"Lack of seriousness of water and forest agents. The control does not even exist anymore."

"Because of the pandemic the control was not very present anymore."

"Corruption of control agents by operators".

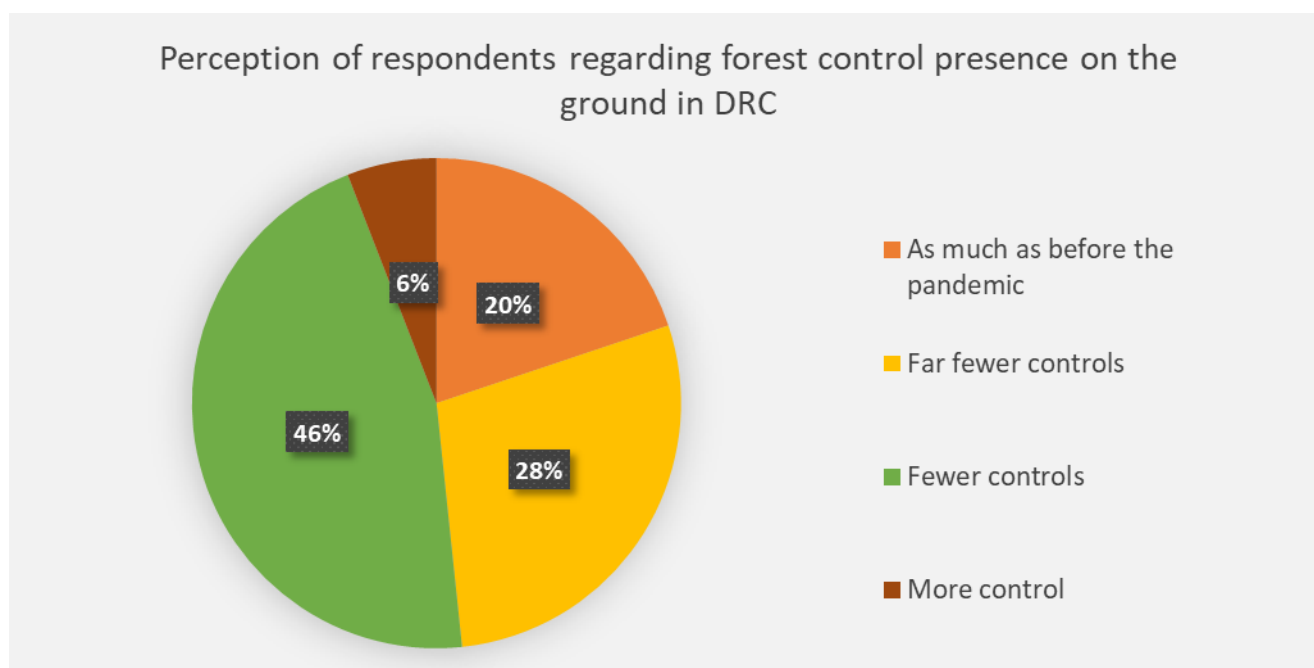


Figure 27: Perception of respondents regarding forest control presence on the ground in DRC

A similar trend was observed in the Republic of Congo where 64% of respondents perceived a decline in availability of forest control agents on the ground.

³⁰ Respondent from DRC

Perception of presence and availability of government forest control activities in ROC

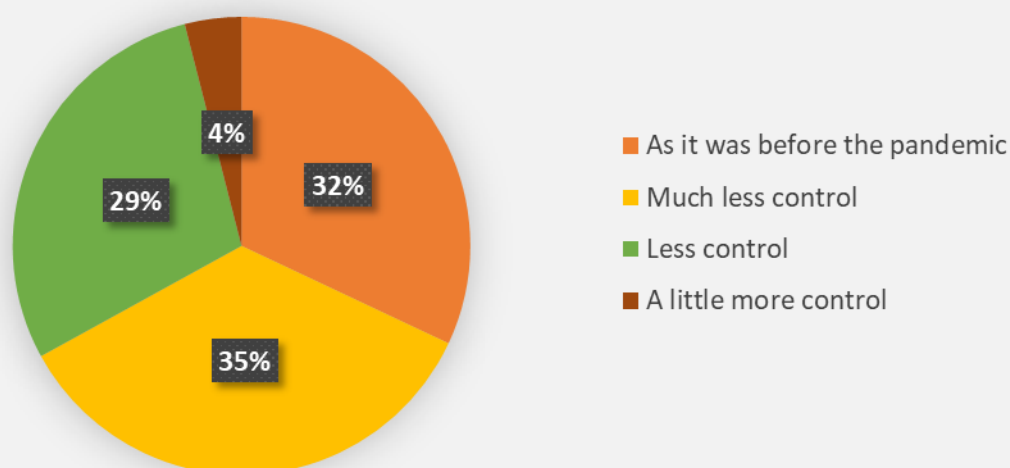


Figure 28: Perception of respondents regarding forest control presence on the ground in Congo

When asked why they felt this way, some respondents said:

"The controllers used to be irregular, now they are rare."

"The controls have decreased following the pandemic."

"Everything is stopped."

"Operators deal directly with the administration without consulting the communities."

"Operators do not comply with the regulations."

"Everyone is doing whatever they want in the forest now."

"There is complicity between enforcement officers and poachers".

In all countries, there were also those who believed that there hadn't been much of a change in the frequency or the pattern of these forest control missions since the beginning of the pandemic: in Cameroon they represented 16% of the respondents, in DRC 20% of the respondents, and in Congo they were 32% of the respondents. As one of the DRC respondents explained "Controllers do not do the job very well due to lack of necessary resources"³¹. Finally, only a minority of respondents saw that there is an increase in those missions in comparison with before the pandemic: around 24% in Cameroon, 6% in DRC and 4% in Congo. One of the Cameroonian respondents said "We ask for the services of the MINFOF from time to time to do forest control missions for the fauna in our forest concessions"³².

³¹ Respondent from DRC

³² Respondent from Cameroon

Perception of Illegal logging

With limited presence of forest control officials on the ground, was there a perceived rise in forest illegality? Indeed, research findings in all countries suggested this was the case.

In Cameroon, the largest proportion of respondents, 28%, believed that illegal logging had become worse since the pandemic started. One of the Cameroonian respondents commented “*We see trucks filled with logs driving around all the time*”³³. Likewise, 21% felt it had become ‘much worse’. 19%, however, believed that nothing had changed since the pandemic started, 22% felt that the sector was improving, and that illegal logging was decreasing, while 10% believed it was decreasing significantly. (Figure 29)

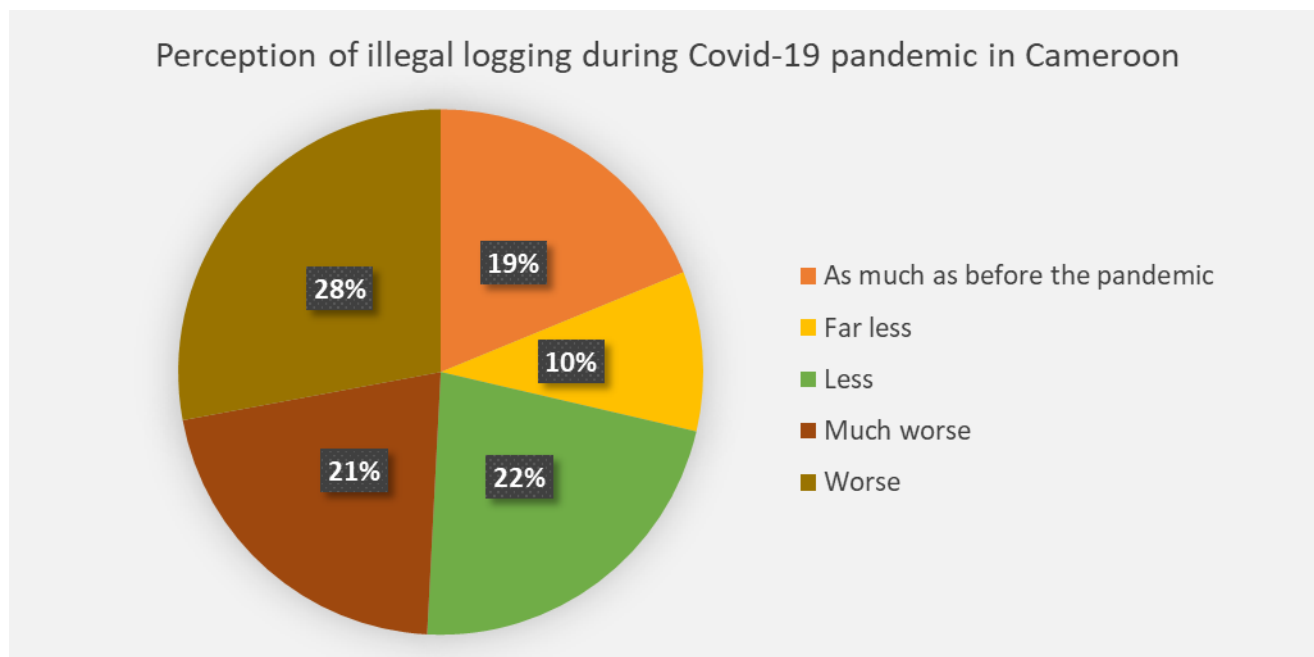


Figure 29: Perception of illegal logging in Cameroon

Overall, the expressed sentiment that illegal logging is increasing, seems to match what they saw as fewer control missions on the ground. Some of them attributed this to the pandemic, while others attributed it to corruption within the ranks of forest control authorities: “*The operators force the chief by using their relations from Yaoundé*”³⁴. In Cameroon, several other contributing factors were identified:

“Less control over land boundaries between the Baka and Bantu people.”

“Exploitation is carried out even after delineation”

“Operating companies exceed their allocated limits”

“People chop wood as they want and destroy the forest as they want”.

“Corruption and village ignorance open the doors of the village”

“They always pass by with the hunters every day”.

“They are often spotted when a board truck is loading.”

“They cut the wood and during this period without control the trucks always transport the wood”.

It is noteworthy that those who believed that illegal logging was decreasing attributed this not to any increased efficiency by the governmental control agents, but more to the lockdown measures³⁵.

³³ Respondent from Cameroon.

³⁴ Respondent from Cameroon

³⁵ Respondent from Cameroon

In DRC however, almost 54% of the respondents shared the perception that illegal logging was becoming worse since the pandemic started. An additional 12% of the respondents agreed even more strongly that this was the case. However, counteracting that view, 16% believed that illegal logging was decreasing, 13% believed nothing had changed since the beginning of the pandemic and 6% felt there had been a significant decrease in illegal logging activities. See figure 30.

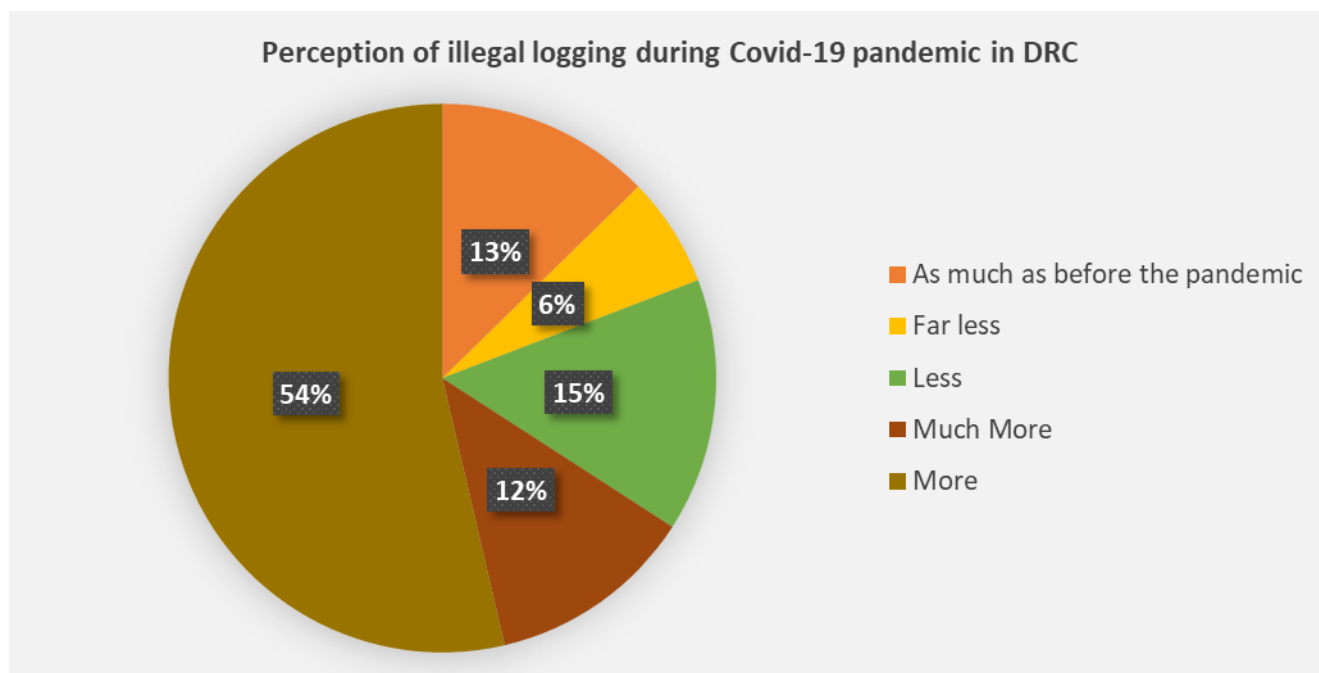


Figure 30: Perception of illegal logging in DRC

When DRC respondents were asked why they thought illegal logging was on the rise, they raised a number of key issues around corruption and the increased presence of chainsaw operators in villages.

“They no longer control, finding that companies are still exploiting wood without taking the pandemic into account”.

“[There is too much logging and animal exploitation”

“The logging trucks keeps passing over the wood , every day you can hear the sound of the chainsaw”.

“I have no idea, I only see the planks passed over the wagons, so nothing has changed.”

“They’re only on the road in addition, they’re corrupt. When you cut your wood, make sure you have their money to spend once to get through the forest”.

In Congo, many respondents seemed rather pessimistic in their perception of illegal logging in their country. Around 46% of them believed that nothing changed since before the pandemic. 19% believed illegal logging was becoming much worse than before, 9% see it as worse; while an equal percentage of respondents, 13% for both, believed illegal logging is decreasing or drastically decreasing since Covid-19. See figure 31.

Perceived levels of illegal logging in Congo

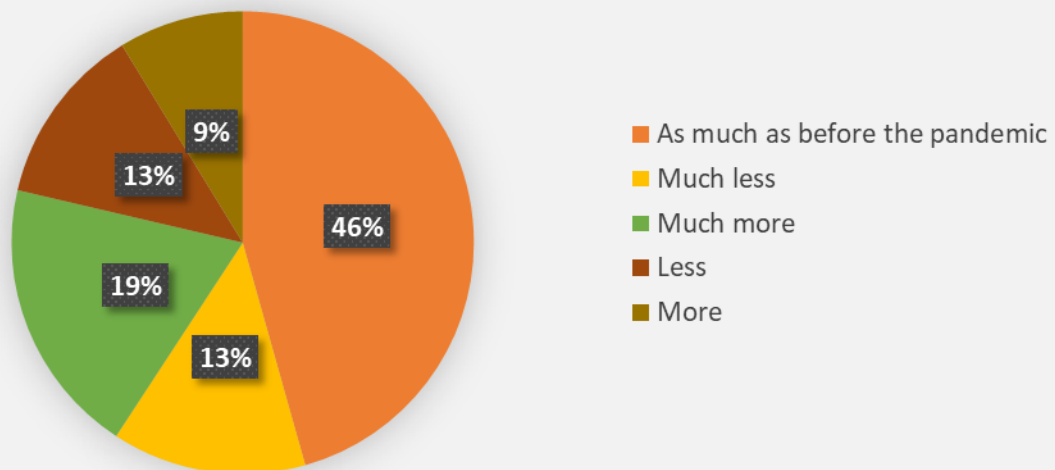


Figure 31: Perception of illegal logging in Cameroon

There was a widespread conviction among respondents that almost all economic operators in the forestry sector were, in one way or another, involved in illegal and corrupt practices with the forest control departments in the government. One respondent summarized these issues as follows: *"Especially with the delay created by the lockdown, and the remarkable absence of controllers, the forbidden wood to be cut is cut, all these companies that have been brought here do not have good records. We often see them discussing with Water and Forestry departments when they can be there, they always call [some influential contact]. so, this weakens the agent."*³⁶. Several others said:

"The boundaries of the UFA are still not respected as before."

"In our communities, we still see the presence of these operators in our villages."

"All chainsaw loggers are cutting arbitrarily."

"Trucks full of sawn wood continue to pass in our village all the time."

"We are seeing an increase in traffic in the forest."

"Screening officers are using this pandemic time to multiply controls and make money from operators".

"Many people, even those in the administration, are illegally logging timber".

Illegal wildlife trafficking

Considering that over 70% of emerging zoonoses emerge from deforestation and illegal wildlife trade (FAO, 2020a), the survey was interested to assess community perspectives on the illegal wildlife trade during the pandemic. We expected that, the situation would worsen in the region as a result of the pandemic. But was this the case?

In Cameroon, there was little difference in numbers between those who believed that wildlife hunting and trafficking was becoming more common during the pandemic (43%) and those who believed it was decreasing (40%), with a further 17% perceiving little or no change since the pandemic started as shown in figure 32. Many of those who believed that wildlife trafficking had decreased during the pandemic attributed this to fear on the part of hunters and traffickers of encountering wild animals. *"They fear catching some illness"*³⁷, explained a respondent from Cameroon. Others also added that *"Animals are becoming more complicated to hunt"*³⁸ or

³⁶ Respondent from Congo

³⁷ Respondent from Cameroon

³⁸ Respondents from Cameroon

"There is a lack of wild animals, they are becoming more difficult to come across now"³⁹. Another added "It's the lack of money, people consume less game meat now because they can't afford it"⁴⁰. On the same note, most of those who believed wildlife trafficking had increased or hadn't changed since the pandemic started mostly highlighted the lack of presence of forestry control missions on the ground, or the corruption of their agents as the main reasons underlying their belief⁴¹.

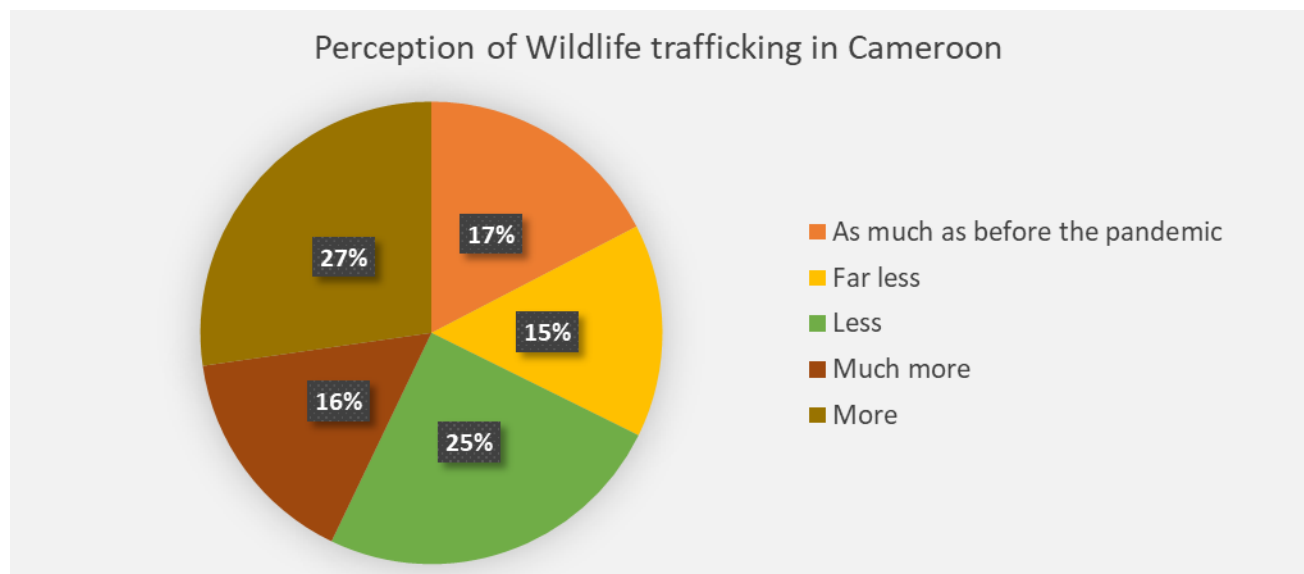
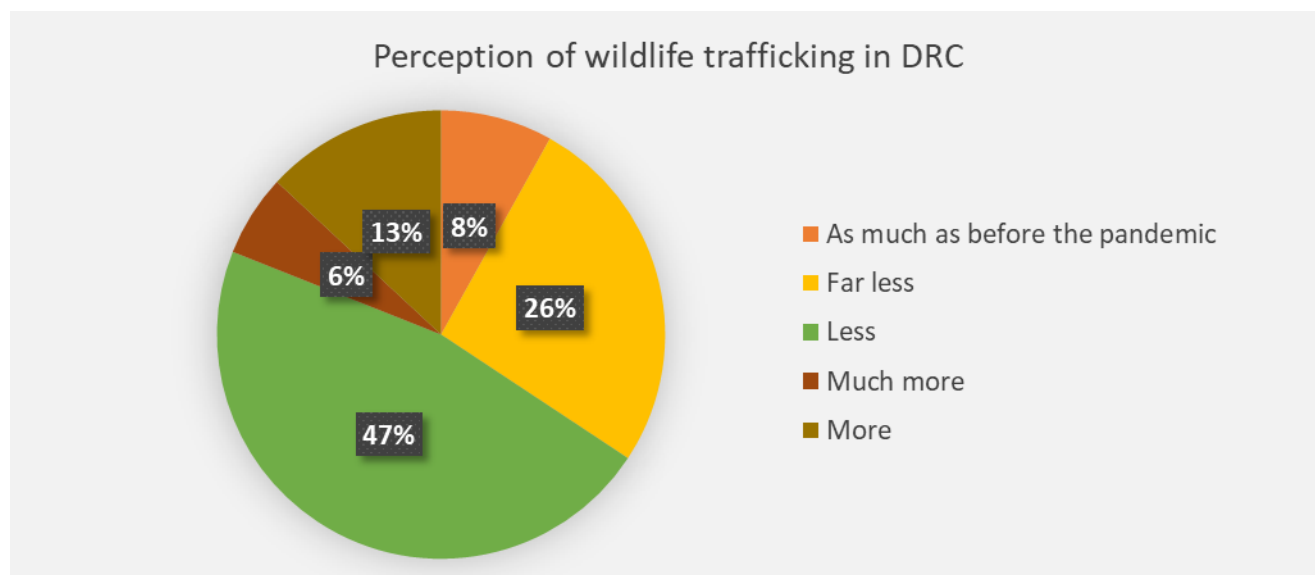


Figure 32: Perception of Wildlife trafficking in Cameroon

In DRC, the respondents were more inclined to believe that wildlife trafficking had decreased (47%) or drastically decreased (26%) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many explained this position in relation to the lockdown measures: "The closing of the borders and the ban on travel have increased controls, which triggered fear among traffickers"⁴²; others believed that it was simply due to a lack of animals in the forest, since they were becoming harder to come across, or simply because of decreased demand⁴³. Only 8% believed that things hadn't changed since the pandemic started whereas 13% believed that wildlife trafficking was getting worse, and 6% believed it was getting much worse. One respondent explained "There is no opening or closing of hunting at the provincial level, there is a flood of wild animals in the markets of the city of Mbandaka."⁴⁴



³⁹ Respondents from Cameroon

⁴⁰ Respondent from Cameroon

⁴¹ Respondents from Cameroon

⁴² Respondent from DRC

⁴³ Respondents from DRC

⁴⁴ Respondent from DRC

Figure 32: Perception of Wildlife trafficking in DRC

In Congo, most of the respondents were inclined to believe that illegal wildlife trafficking was decreasing (42% believe it was much less, and 14% believed it was less), while 19% didn't perceive any change since the pandemic started as shown in figure 33. One respondent explained *"The local hunters were absent, only the loggers came to sell the game to the villages"*⁴⁵. Around 25% believed it illegal wildlife trafficking is increasing (15%) or increasing dramatically (10%). A respondent explained *"Today, there are no more animals known as protected, we kill everything that comes along"*. A few respondents reflected a sentiment that it was mostly, in their views, "foreigners" or economic operators from outside their region who are responsible for wildlife trafficking: *"You can inquire. A Malaysian passed here with a little monkey. He was going to Pplore"*⁴⁶, another added *"Our little monkeys are the target of these Asian drivers"*⁴⁷. Another mentioned that economic operators, especially Asian *"They used to sell our little gorillas and monkeys to friends"*⁴⁸.

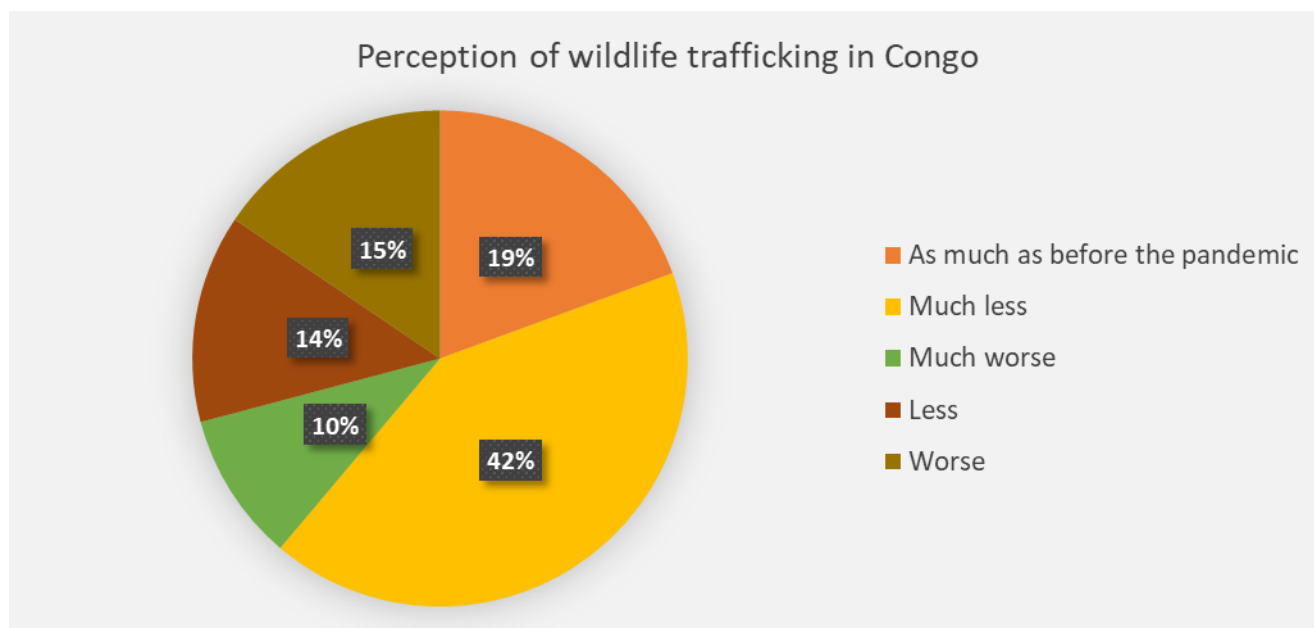


Figure 33: Perception of Wildlife trafficking in Congo

The following section presents an analysis of the suggestions made by respondents on how to address the forest governance challenges identified.

⁴⁵ Respondent from Congo

⁴⁶ Respondent from Congo

⁴⁷ Respondent from Congo

⁴⁸ Respondent from Congo

Proposed actions to address Covid impacts on forest and wildlife illegality

When asked propose actions to address the problems of weak forest control, illegal logging and illegal wildlife trafficking identified, 729 references were obtained and categorised into three main groups. These were community based actions, development/strengthening of livelihoods and government forest control and enforcement.

Table 4: Proposed actions to redress forest and wildlife illegality

Proposed actions to redress forest and wildlife illegality	Number of coded references
A. Community based actions	
Increase sensitisation about consequences of forest illegality	170
Better forest monitoring by communities	53
Enhance community participation in forest management	39
Improve benefit sharing from forests	14
Support community forestry	14
B. Alternative livelihoods	
Technical and financial support	42
Create and provide jobs	34
Invest in plantations, reforestation and afforestation	27
Promote agriculture and livestock production	27
Facilitate access to forest exploitation permits and markets	6
Alternatives to hunters and wildlife traffickers	4
C. Government control and law enforcement action	
Stronger government control	211
Stronger law enforcement	88
Total coded references	729

Source: Nvivo analysis output



A: Community based actions

40% of all coded references on actions required to address forest illegality were related to community actions. The most important suggestion being the need to strengthen awareness raising and sensitisation of stakeholders about the consequences of forest illegality on biodiversity and protected species but also on what communities need to do to denounce forest illegality in their communities. As respondents said;

"Talk about the consequences of the destruction of biodiversity"

"Talk about the importance of the forest and the protected species"

"It is necessary to raise public awareness to know how to defend the forests"

"It is necessary to raise awareness and sanction the illegal operators"

Other suggestions included organising meetings with hunters to find common solutions, to sensitise them on the forest and wildlife legislation and providing alternative livelihoods to hunters in order to reduce their impacts on wildlife.

Linked to the need for communities to defend their communities and forests, forest monitoring emerged as the second most referenced approach. As one respondent stated, *"we wish to denounce but we don't have the possibility to do so"*. Another respondent suggested that *"it is necessary to reinforce controls and to equip the population with the means of denunciation"*. Others proposed the need to create community surveillance groups and committees suggesting that *"people need to continue to report cases of illegal timber harvesting"*. According to

communities, NGOs and government can support them in this direction. For instance, *"NGOs concerned with forestry need to support committees or vigilance groups -they need to get to work"*. They should *"empower village forest guardians by providing them with radar and other means of obtaining evidence in the event of legal proceedings"*. Also, *"we ask the government to recruit local control agents for more control, because it is first and foremost our forest"*.

This emphasises the fact that communities consider the issue to be their priority in the first place. This is because a significant number of respondents argued for a stronger role in forest management. *"The local populations, the first victims of this illegality, must be involved"*. Unfortunately, many IPs stated that *"here in the village we don't have the voice"*. Our *"communities are never consulted"*, they need to *"recognise the Baka"*. Part of this engagement and participation is about accessing the benefits from forest exploitation which can contribute towards reducing community impacts on forest and development of community forestry initiatives.

Regarding benefit sharing, there was the view that *"there must be legal exploitation for the community to benefit from it"*. The aspect of legality is important here because as another respondent stated, *"exploitation must be organized to benefit everyone and to punish those who plunder the timber without giving anything to the local residents"*. Respondents stated that their share of forest royalties need to be returned to the villages but unfortunately, some respondents expressed frustration because *"the population no longer knows what the money from forest royalties is used for"*. *"The authorities keep all the benefits from the forest"* another one said.

Community forestry could contribute towards improving participation, access to benefits and job creation for youth. A number of suggestions were proposed to revitalise existing initiatives or to create new ones. With the lockdowns, respondents pleaded for the administration to reorganise and finance community forestry projects and to sanction those

who were exploiting the system for their benefits. One respondent said the administration should *"legalise our community forest which will provide jobs for youth"*. Another suggested that this will provide alternative jobs to poachers and livelihoods to the communities.



B: Alternative livelihoods

19% of all coded references were on the need to support and rebuild community livelihoods as a strategy to address the problems of forest and wildlife illegality. As already mentioned, also providing alternatives to poachers and jobs particularly to youth. As one respondent stated, *"to stop the abusive exploitation of fauna and flora; transform wood locally to provide employment for indigenous people"*. Respondents identified different potential areas of support and need.

The most important requests were in the form of technical and financial assistance. *"We want training on income generating activities"* as well as *"government should fund communities to create other activities"*. Some others pleaded for support measures to be put in place to *"help local residents to convert to other activities"*. *"The Baka need financing, we hand ourselves over to the State. That the NGOs accompany me financially for my subsidy and my health follow-up"*. This is not surprising considering the significant losses of income reported in section one of this report.

In terms of specific areas of livelihoods identified, tree planting, afforestation and reforestation as well as agriculture and livestock production were prioritised. In terms of tree planting, respondents identified the need for training in nursery techniques. They also called on government to *"launch a reforestation campaign"* and that *"companies should be asked to reforest the area they are operating in for the future"*. While this is already a key part of forest management plans in target countries, enforcing their application would further create local jobs in communities. In addition to this nature based solutions, the need for agriculture and livestock investments were justified by the fact that *"the game is almost finished in our forests so it is necessary that the population practice the breeding of species and livestock to have a source of protein"*. Another stated that it is *"necessary to involve the local populations, the first victims of this illegality; to encourage the adoption of new forms of agriculture to occupy the populations"*. This will *"support the riparian communities in their adaptation"* another opined.



C: Government control and law enforcement action

A slight majority of coded references (41% compared to 40% for community actions) were related to a stronger role for government in addressing the problem of forest and wildlife illegality. Stronger forest control and law enforcement were identified and suggestions made as well. In addition to the need for regular forest controls and patrols, respondents proposed the creation of new forest posts, organisation of unannounced control missions as well as improvements in methods of investigation in order to catch illegal actors. Others suggested the recruitment of more agents and that "that the control services do their job well and do it well". The aspect of effectiveness is crucial because some respondents indicated that corruption was a key issue affecting the ability of officials to do their "jobs well". Some suggested that there needs to be a *"change in the mentality of the authorities in charge"* particularly being vigilant about corruption. Other recommended continuous awareness raising about corruption amongst forest and wildlife control officers. A respondent argued that the *"administration must increase the remuneration of officials and put in place transparent systems"*.

In addition to stronger forest controls, most respondents said government needs to do more to apply the law and sanction defaulters. For instance;

"I think that the State must listen to the local residents who complain to the services

concerned and punish those who exert influence on the local residents who denounce illegal logging"

"The perpetrators must be resolutely punished for these acts, because they do nothing in the locality but they plunder the national heritage by deceiving the poor residents".

Other respondents emphasised the need to *"put pressure on title holders to respect forest management plans"* and to make use of anticorruption institutions in different countries to fight the crime. For instance the *"anticorruption committee (CONAC) must really do its job"*. This is because of the *"powerlessness of the population and corruption of forestry agents"*. The engagement of external stakeholders such as anticorruption agencies and traditional law enforcement agencies has been shown to support forest and wildlife law enforcement efforts (Mbzigain and Mohammed, 2020; Mbzigain and Ongolo, 2019).

Conclusion and recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a significant and unprecedented global crisis, with the harshest impacts being felt by the poor and working classes across the world. On the African continent, the pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of indigenous and tribal peoples and other forest-dependent communities, who were already facing the consequences of climate change, deforestation, forest fires and illegal logging. As part of its response to the pandemic, the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT), carried out a survey of frontline communities impacted by the pandemic in the Congo Basin. This was done as part of its Citizen Voice for Change project (CV4C) which seeks to strengthen civil society independent forest monitoring and law enforcement in the region. The overarching aim of this study was to address the knowledge gap regarding the impacts of Covid-19 on frontline forest dependent communities in the Congo Basin. With additional financial support of the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme and in line with the objectives of the CV4C project, we were particularly interested in understanding the impacts on forest illegality during the pandemic. Finally, it sought to identify the measures and tools that are necessary to enable communities and stakeholders to build back better and strengthen resilience.

We surveyed 7000 forest dependent community members in three CV4C project intervention countries (Cameroon, Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo). Based on the survey results, it is clear that forest dependent communities in the three targeted countries of the Congo Basin are facing significant hardships, with the majority reporting a reduction or a total loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The confinement and lockdown measures imposed by the governments of the three countries have made it more difficult for these communities to maintain their access to the forests, and forest resources (including their fields and crops). In addition, most of these communities lack awareness and/or access to basic protective equipment. Findings show that the pandemic has hit women in the forest dependent communities the hardest, whether economically, socially or psychologically. Economically, most women reported the most significant losses in incomes, and subsequently their ability to manage household expenses, especially with their roles as caregivers.

Evidence suggests that for some women, the pandemic has increased the burden of

responsibilities on women (both household and productive) whilst at the same time limiting opportunities for them to address the shortfall in household incomes. Many of them reported fear and anxiety due to the pandemic, as their social support groups (mostly other women from their village gathering and working together) have been banned because of social distancing. Some of them also reported being victims of domestic violence and/or other forms of gender-based violence.

Most of the respondents in all countries reported a perceived decline in the presence of forest control officials on the ground. Consequently, the majority of respondents in the three targeted countries had the impression that illegal logging was increasing due to the lack of effective forest control.

Respondents further attributed the perceived rise in illegal logging to the parallel rise in artisanal logging, citing evidence of increased activity by chainsaw loggers and exploitation beyond permit boundaries in some cases. Similarly, the views of respondents on wildlife trafficking ran counter to the initial assumptions of the study. Overall, respondents in fact perceived that there had been a decline in illegal wildlife trafficking in their communities. This was somewhat surprising since our initial hypothesis was that illegal logging was likely to go hand in hand with illegal wildlife trafficking. Most respondents believe that the decrease was due to poachers and local hunters being afraid of COVID-19 as a zoonotic disease. Some respondents felt that poaching and wildlife trafficking was decreasing because of a drop in demand from cities due to lockdown measures and limited transportation facilities to transport game to cities. With declining forest controls and perceived rising forest illegality, actions need to be taken to strengthen forest and wildlife law enforcement by stakeholders. This includes a stronger role for civil society independent forest monitoring actions.

A set of recommendations for different relevant stakeholders (national governments of the targeted countries, civil society organisations, international donors and local communities) were provided based on the findings of the study.

For governments in the targeted countries

- There is a strong need to provide support for forest dependent communities and indigenous people: many of them suffered from the poorly implemented lockdown policies, and they have not been reached by any forms of social protection or social assistance to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Having said that, it is important for the government to provide support to build back better livelihoods for these vulnerable categories of the population, with a special focus on youth and women. These better livelihood programmes can be built in an innovative way, through nature-based solutions such as micro-loans to farmers to re-build their fields or to add other sources of food/income through agriculture, tree planting and livestock production including species domestication, which respect both people's culture, climate and biodiversity.
- Ensuring legality/sustainability and inclusive development is at the forefront of a green economic recovery agenda: there is a strong need to ensure effective and efficient forest control missions by the competent authorities. Solutions should also be found for recurrent systemic problems such as corruption. Similarly, it is necessary for the government to increase staff incentives to deter them from corrupt practices. Increased sanctions and engagement with anticorruption agencies and traditional law enforcement could improve forest law enforcement outcomes.
- With a perceived rise in illegal logging from companies and chainsaw operators, continuous support is necessary to organise the domestic market. An example is through facilitating access of domestic operators to public procurement contracts as an incentive to drive down demand for illegal timber. Citizen sensitisation on access to legal timber could also reduce demand for these products.
- It is important to work in partnership with civil society organisations in order to respond more effectively to the needs of women in forest dependent communities. Priorities include providing accessible health care facilities for them, rethinking the legal and law enforcement framework in order to protect them against gender based and domestic violence, or providing financial and material support to help them rebuild their lost livelihoods. Communities would also benefit from mental health support to help them cope with the negative impacts of violence and confinement.
- The history of zoonotic diseases in the Congo Basin suggests that there is a need for governments to engage communities in building resilience and response plans. Participatory plans including working with local community organisations, women's associations, community forestry groups, microfinance institutions could strengthen future response to pandemics and reduce negative impacts on communities. The establishment of social safety nets is particularly important where community livelihoods are impacted.

For national and international NGOs

- Civil society needs to provide more support to forest dependent communities and indigenous people, not only by providing immediate humanitarian support, micro projects or other forms of technical and financial support, but also by enabling these communities to defend their rights and denounce forest illegality. Civil society organisations can also support community monitoring of forests through the use of technology where these technologies are available.
- Civil society organisations need to work together with forest dependent communities and indigenous people to ensure that women and youth are participating effectively in recovery investment planning, and to ensure that their needs are taken into consideration.
- A special focus should be placed on women in forest dependent communities, to respond not only to their immediate economic problems but also to respond more effectively to their other social and healthcare needs. This should prioritise providing more accessible and reliable healthcare facilities for women in these communities and deliver targeted actions to protect them against gender-based violence.
- The need for strong civil society involvement in independent forest monitoring, and active intervention in the field of conservation and combatting the illegal wildlife trade, is more crucial than ever in the post- Covid-19 era. With a decline in government presence on the ground and rising forest illegality, stronger civil society monitoring capability is needed to support/ complement government efforts.

- In addition to monitoring at forest level, civil society needs to monitor government commitments to fight forest illegality, biodiversity conservation and climate change. There is a risk that governments might prioritise investments in destructive extractive industries in order to rebuild economies. Strong advocacy and monitoring could help maintain momentum on commitments made.
- Civil society organisations and monitoring organisations must also build their own capabilities to operate in periods of pandemic. This includes increasing technological capabilities as well as building stronger community monitoring networks with community leaders and citizens.

For donors

- Provide targeted support to forest dependent communities, IPLCs and women through green recovery projects. This could include building resilience through community forestry, women's associations, microfinance support to women and IPLCs, provide shock- responsive social protection for vulnerable communities, ideally in cooperation with national governments and local civil society. Entrepreneurship and business incubator support schemes could further support local government actions.
- Prioritise support to governments to strengthen forest and wildlife law enforcement and monitoring and maintain pressure not to relax commitments made to fight forest and environmental crime and climate change
- Provide support for local civil society in projects related to social protection, fighting Gender Based Violence and support to both physical and mental health services for forest dependent communities.

For communities

- Continue to respect national guidelines regarding social distancing and other control measures.
- Continue to mobilise in village groups and other associations to maintain social support networks and to explore community responses to Covid-19 impacts.
- Explore all avenues to participate and engage in post Covid recovery planning, to ensure that community needs are effectively taken into consideration by decision makers.
- Engage with the government, civil society and donor efforts to support local livelihoods through climate smart nature- based solutions or green enterprises, that provide employment, protect the environment and build resilience.
- Enhance sensitisation and awareness in communities to denounce illegal loggers and poachers and promote alternative opportunities for hunters and poachers.
- Explore linkages with independent forest and wildlife monitoring and law enforcement agencies in order to build community systems for monitoring and law enforcement in communities in the face of rising forest and other environmental crimes. The use of smart and mobile phone technologies could increase reporting of illegality and serve as a disincentive for illegal actors operating in communities.

Foreign governments

- As vaccines are developed and approved, vaccine nationalism is likely to emerge. Promote support to Congo Basin governments to access and distribute vaccines to their communities, including specific emphasis on vulnerable forest dependent communities.
- In the face of global GDP declines, maintain or increase international development aid commitments to ensure that health, environmental and other global climate objectives are kept on track.

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Annex 1: Survey Questionnaire (in French):

Projet CV4C

Questions sondage des impacts du COVID-19.

I. Identification

Noms de l'enquêté (Facultatif) _____ date : _____

Ville _____ Age _____

Sexe : Masculin ☐ Féminin ☐

Niveau d'éducation : Jamais allé(e) à l'école ☐ Primaire ☐ Secondaire ☐ Supérieur ☐

Situation matrimoniale : Célibataire ☐ Marié(e) ☐ Divorcé(e) ☐ Veuf (ve) ☐

Activité principale/plus grand source de revenu : Agriculteur(trice) ☐ Commerçant(e) ☐

Employé du privé ☐ Fonctionnaire ☐ Sans emploi ☐ Autre ☐

II. IMPACTS SUR les ménages

1. La pandémie de COVID 19 a-t-elle affecté votre ménage d'une manière ou d'une autre ?

Oui/Non

2. Si oui de quelle manière?

a) Membre(s) de la famille infecté(s) _____

b) Décès dans la famille _____

c) Réduction ou augmentation des revenus _____

a. *En cas de réduction ou perte de revenus de l'activité principale, pourriez-vous estimer quel pourcentage ?*

d) Y a-t-il d'autres façons dont vous avez été affecté ? _____

1. Avez-vous pris des mesures pour vous adapter ? Oui ☐ Non ☐

2. Si oui, lesquelles ? _____

3. Avez-vous d'autres problèmes non résolus ? Oui ☐ Non ☐

4. Si oui, lesquels ? _____

5. Selon vous, qu'est-ce qui peut être fait pour que la situation revienne à la normale ? Et par qui ? _____

III. Impact sur les Peuples autochtones et Communautés locales ?

De quelle manière cette pandémie a-t-elle affecté les peuples autochtones et les communautés dépendantes de la forêt ? Exemples concrets _____

Comment cela a-t-il affecté spécifiquement les femmes dépendantes de la forêt ? _____

Quelles mesures doivent être mises en place aujourd'hui et à l'avenir pour les soutenir ? _____

IV. Impacts perçus sur l'exploitation et le commerce illégal du bois et/trafique de la faune

Par rapport à la période normale avant la pandémie du COVID 19, comment évalueriez-vous les situations suivantes maintenant :

1. **Contrôle des forêts par l'administration :** Bien moins de contrôles ☐
Moins de contrôles ☐ Autant qu'avant la pandémie ☐ Un peu plus de contrôles ☐
☐ Bien plus de contrôles ☐

Veillez expliquer votre réponse, avec des exemples ? _____

2. **Exploitation forestière illégale :** Bien pire ☐ Pire ☐ Autant qu'avant la pandémie ☐
Moindre ☐ Bien moindre ☐

Veillez expliquer votre réponse, avec des exemples ? _____

3. **Trafic d'animaux sauvages :** Bien pire ☐ Pire ☐ Autant qu'avant la pandémie ☐
Moindre ☐ Bien moindre ☐

Veillez expliquer votre réponse, avec des exemples ? _____

4. **Efficacité des contrôles forestiers** : Bien moins efficace ☐ pins efficace ☐ Aus ☐
efficace qu'avant la pandémie ☐ Plus efficace ☐ Bien ☐ plus efficace ☐

Veillez expliquer votre réponse, avec des exemples ? _____

5. **La perception des recettes forestières par l'administration** : Bien inférieure ☐
Inférieure ☐ Autant qu'avant la pandémie ☐ Supérieure ☐ Bien ☐
supérieure ☐

Veillez expliquer votre réponse, avec des exemples ? _____

Avez-vous identifier les cas d'illégalités (forets et faunes) dans votre localité que vous voulez dénoncer ? si oui, lesquelles ?

Selon vous, que faut-il faire à l'heure actuelle pour remédier aux conséquences de l'exploitation illégale des forêts et du commerce des espèces sauvages ?

Avez-vous quelque chose à ajouter ? _____

Je vous remercie.